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# ON THE NATURE AND IDENTITY OF THE MORAL VIRTUES

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the present thesis is entirely my own work, except where otherwise indicated by means of quotation, reference and acknowledgement. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except where specified.

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Date: **2015**

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of virtue is a vital one for many current debates within philosophy. In particular, both virtue ethics and virtue epistemology have come to be viewed as legitimate contenders within their respective domains. The task of virtue theory – of giving an account of the virtues – is therefore an especially pressing one. If we do not have a satisfactory account of the virtues, then we will be unable to evaluate those virtue-centric approaches that have come to be accepted as legitimate contenders within both ethics and epistemology.

This thesis focuses on the moral virtues and addresses two related issues. The first issue to be addressed concerns the *nature* of the moral virtues (or what the virtues are). I discuss three different positions on this issue: the skills model (on which a virtue is a type of skill); the composite model (on which a virtue is a combination of skill plus a characteristic motivation); and the motivations model (on which a virtue is a particular type of motivation). A chapter is devoted to each of these three models, explaining the reasons in favour of endorsing each account before then considering objections. I provide support for the motivations model by first arguing against both the skills and composite models (in Chapters One and Two). I then defend the motivations model against serious objections (in Chapters Three and Four). My aim is to demonstrate that the motivations model is a legitimate contender in this debate, and a live option for those working in virtue theory.

The second issue to be addressed concerns the *identity* of the moral virtues (or which traits ought to be included on a list of moral virtues). I evaluate (in Chapter Five) three different approaches to identifying the moral virtues, before suggesting that we ought to consider a view whereby kindness and justice are taken to be fundamentally virtuous traits. I then (in Chapter Six) explain and defend this suggestion, by proposing a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. I argue that this understanding is able to provide plausible accounts of specific virtuous traits, in addition to providing solutions to problems currently facing all virtue theorists. There is good reason to accept a cardinal understanding of virtue that identifies kindness and justice as the fundamental moral virtues.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1. THE CONCEPT OF VIRTUE

What does it mean to be a good person? In attempting to answer this question, it is important to think about the traits or features that we would expect a good person to possess. In particular, it is important to think about *virtues*. This thesis is an investigation into the concept of virtue, with a particular focus on the nature and identity of the moral virtues. The aim of this General Introduction is to provide a brief explanation of the concepts and issues that will be the focus of this work, as well as to provide a brief overview of each chapter. I will begin by making some general comments about the concept of virtue, and by highlighting the important position that this concept has come to occupy within philosophy.

While there is much disagreement over what a virtue consists of, as well as over which traits or features ought to be accepted as being virtues, it is nevertheless possible to identify some widely accepted properties. Virtues are positive traits or features of a person's character. They are internal features that make their possessor *good* in some way. And a moral virtue will be an internal feature of a person's character that makes them *morally* good. An initial list of moral virtues might be expected to include traits such as: courage, kindness, generosity, honesty, justice, temperance, integrity and compassion (although the accuracy of such a list will be the subject of discussion in this work). Importantly, the virtues are not typically taken to be one-off mental occurrences, or the type of thing that will be reflected merely in one-off actions. Instead, such traits are 'deep' aspects of a person's character, at least in the sense that they are expected to be relatively persistent, but also in the sense that they are expected to affect a person's behaviour and feelings in response to a wide variety of circumstances. An honest person is not thought to be one who simply avoids saying anything false. Instead, they will be disposed to avoid deception in a variety of ways, and to experience certain feelings or emotions (such as aversion) in response to the possibility of deceiving others. These are all widely accepted features of a virtue. And the concept of virtue has come to be a vital one for many current debates within philosophy.



When detailing the history of interest in the virtues in the Western world, writers commonly present the following familiar story:<sup>1</sup> The virtues were a central feature of ethical theorising in Ancient Greece, with theorists such as Plato and Aristotle providing influential accounts of the nature of the virtues and of the importance of virtuous activity. The influence of this tradition remained strong until, at least, medieval times (augmented by the works of Augustine and Aquinas). However, so the familiar story goes, philosophical interest in the virtues subsequently waned and was not revived until after the publication of G. E. M. Anscombe's 'Modern Moral Philosophy' in 1958.<sup>2</sup> In this work, Anscombe criticises the dominant ethical approaches of deontology and consequentialism, and suggests that the downsides of these approaches could best be resolved by ethicists refocusing on virtue terms (and on the related notion of human well-being). Following this, contemporary theorists began the process of attempting to provide and explain virtue-centric approaches to key ethical issues, leading to what has been widely referred to as a "resurgence" of interest in the virtues.<sup>3</sup> 'Virtue ethics' has since come to be widely regarded as a legitimate and distinct contender to both deontology and consequentialism within the ethical domain.

The strict accuracy of this story has been questioned. In particular, the claim that the notion of virtue was significantly neglected for a substantial period of time has been disputed.<sup>4</sup> However, regardless of its accuracy, it is clear that this story must now be amended to include details of the explosion of interest in (and subsequent discussion of) the virtues in recent times. As noted, virtue-centric approaches are now well established within the ethical domain, with influential contemporary contributions being provided by: Philippa Foot in *Virtues and Vices* (1978, re-printed 2002); Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981); Julia Annas in *Morality of Happiness* (1993) and *Intelligent Virtue* (2011); Rosalind Hursthouse in *On Virtue Ethics* (1999); Michael Slote in *Morals from Motives* (2001); Christine Swanton in *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (2003); Robert Adams in *A*

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<sup>1</sup> Versions of this story (detailing the key role played by Anscombe's paper) are presented in, for example: Timpe and Boyd (eds.) (2014); Baehr (2011), section 1.2.1; Battaly (ed.) (2010); Crisp and Slote (eds.) (1997); and Statman (ed.) (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Anscombe (1958)

<sup>3</sup> Timpe and Boyd (2014) p. 1

<sup>4</sup> See Schneewind (1997)

*Theory of Virtue* (2006); and Daniel Russell in *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (2009).<sup>5</sup> In these works, and elsewhere, theorists have carried out the task of addressing issues of central concern to ethicists in a distinctively virtue-centric way, and each of these representative texts has generated substantial discussion in its own right. Furthermore, theorists working within the other major ethical traditions have responded to this move towards virtue by providing accounts of the moral virtues in terms more suited to their own consequentialist or deontological approaches. For example, Julia Driver provides a consequentialist account of the virtues in *Uneasy Virtue* (2001), and Nancy Sherman discusses Kant's approach to the virtues in *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (1997).<sup>6</sup> The issues and problems raised by these contemporary ethicists (and the responses to them) provide ample material for critical discussion. In this work, I will focus on the contemporary debate and address two of the issues that have been raised by theorists interested in the moral virtues. These issues concern the *nature* of the moral virtues (what the virtues are) and the *identity* of the moral virtues (what traits ought to be included on a list of the virtues). An overview of the direction that this work will take is provided in Section 3, below.

It is important to point out at this stage that ethicists have not been alone in turning their attention to the concept of virtue. A similar move has been made within epistemology, with competing versions of 'virtue epistemology' also coming to be viewed as legitimate contenders within that domain. Such accounts appeal to the notion of *intellectual* (or epistemic) virtue, and suggest that the issues of concern to epistemology (such as the attempt to define knowledge, and related issues) can be resolved by focusing on such traits. Influential accounts within the recent virtue epistemology movement include those presented by: Ernest Sosa in 'The Raft and the Pyramid' (1980) and *A Virtue Epistemology* (2007); Linda Zagzebski in *Virtues of the Mind* (1996); John Greco in *Achieving Knowledge* (2010); and Jason Baehr in *The Inquiring Mind* (2011).<sup>7</sup> While my interest in this thesis lies with the moral virtues, much can still be gained from the virtue epistemology literature. What these theorists have to say about intellectual virtues

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<sup>5</sup> This list is not presented as being by any means exhaustive.

<sup>6</sup> For more on a Kantian understanding of virtue see the contributions in Betzler (ed.) (2008), as well as Louden (1986).

<sup>7</sup> Again, this list is presented as indicative rather than exhaustive.

has implications for accounts of the moral virtues (and their possible connection to the intellectual virtues), and some of these theorists also work within ethics and discuss the moral virtues directly.<sup>8</sup> I will, therefore, not limit the discussion to work more typically taken to be a part of the virtue literature within ethics. It will often be fruitful to consider the work of other contemporary theorists who concern themselves with the concept of virtue.

I now want to highlight some important distinctions that exist within the virtue literature. In particular, it will be important to distinguish those debates that I will be attempting to address in this thesis from those (often closely related) debates that I will not. The following should, therefore, help to avoid any misunderstandings regarding what is or is not being claimed at later points in this work.

## 2. CLARIFICATIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

It is especially important to highlight that this thesis is an attempt to add to the debate within virtue *theory*, as opposed to an attempt to provide a version of virtue *ethics*. Drawing a distinction between virtue theory and virtue ethics is just one of the ways of understanding the different projects that theorists might be involved in when discussing the moral virtues. For example, David Solomon proposes a different three-way distinction between: (i) “radical” virtue ethics; (ii) “routine” virtue ethics; and (iii) non-virtue-ethical accounts which nevertheless seek to accommodate virtue-talk.<sup>9</sup> Supporters of “routine” virtue ethics include those theorists who seek to give priority to the virtues when addressing the central concerns of ethics, but who are otherwise satisfied to work within the generally agreed-upon conventions of ethical theorising.<sup>10</sup> Forms of “radical” virtue ethics, on the other hand, seek to challenge commonly accepted features of

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as Hursthouse (1999, p. 5, footnote 7) acknowledges, Part II of Zagzebski’s *Virtues of the Mind* “is substantial enough to count as a book on virtue ethics in its own right”.

<sup>9</sup> Solomon (2003)

<sup>10</sup> Solomon (p. 66) suggests that Michael Slote can be understood as exemplifying a form of routine virtue ethics. Of course, this is compatible with Slote’s work being deserving of the label ‘radical’ for other reasons, or in other contexts. In *Morals from Motives*, Slote attempts to provide an “agent-based” approach to ethics that he takes to be without significant precedent. If this is correct, Slote’s view could certainly be classed as a “radical” contribution under some other understanding of the term. See Slote (2001) Chapter 8.

ethical thought, such as the assumption in favour of the importance of moral rules, or the tendency to view agents in an abstract or detached fashion.<sup>11</sup> This distinction between radical and routine virtue ethics (and non-virtue-ethics) is, then, one way of understanding different projects featuring the virtues within ethics. Another way is to draw a distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory. This distinction is well explained by Daniel Russell (who attributes it to Julia Driver):

roughly, a virtue theory is a theory of what the virtues are, whereas virtue ethics holds the virtues to be central to a theory of the ethical evaluation of action... To be sure, every virtue ethic must build on a virtue theory, but no virtue theorist – no one with a theory about the nature of the virtues – need for that reason be a virtue ethicist.<sup>12</sup>

On this understanding, anyone who attempts to provide an account of the moral virtues will be engaged in virtue theory, even if they should not be classed as being in any way a virtue ethicist. This distinction is one that is now widely accepted and relied upon in the literature.<sup>13</sup> And with this distinction in mind, it is worth emphasising that I will not, in this work, be attempting to propose or defend a form of virtue ethics. For example, I will not be concerned to provide an account of morally right action that places moral virtue at its foundation. I will instead be attempting to add to the debate within virtue theory, or the understanding of the virtues themselves. While this explanation of the distinction has been brief, it should be sufficient to clarify, and to demonstrate the importance of, virtue theory. Given the importance of the concept of virtue within both ethics and epistemology, the task of virtue theory is especially pressing. If we do not have an account of the virtues then we will be unable to work out (for example) how the morally virtuous agent would act, or what the intellectually virtuous agent would believe. In short, we will be unable to assess those virtue-centric approaches that are taken to be legitimate contenders within both ethics and epistemology.

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<sup>11</sup> Solomon (2003) pp. 68–69 (It is worth noting again that this is just one way of making distinctions in this area. Daniel Statman, for example, describes virtue ethics in general in a way that would only include those theories listed as “radical” by Solomon. See Statman (1997) p. 3.)

<sup>12</sup> Russell (2009) p. ix

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Driver (1996); Swanton (2003) p. 5; Hursthouse (2006) p. 1; and Snow (2010) pp. 1–2.

It is also important to briefly clarify the three accounts of the nature of the moral virtues that I will be considering in this thesis. A more detailed explanation of these accounts is provided in the chapters dedicated to them (in addition to an explanation of why these accounts are worthy of consideration). It will, however, be useful to set out their basic claims in this introduction. The first account that I will consider is the *skills model* of the moral virtues. According to the skills model, the possession of a moral virtue consists in the possession of a particular type of practical skill (or set of skills). The second account that I will consider is motivated (to an extent) by the proposed failings of the skills model. According to the *composite model* of the moral virtues, a moral virtue consists of *both* the possession of skill(s) or know-how *and* the possession of a motivation that is characteristic of the virtue in question. The composite model therefore moves beyond the skills model by adding the requirement of a characteristic motivational component. And the consideration of possible problems for the composite model (in Chapter Two) justifies discussion of a third account of the virtues. According to the *motivations model* of the moral virtues, the possession of a moral virtue consists in the possession of a motivation of a particular sort. I explain (in Chapter Three) the central claim of the motivations model before then (in the remainder of Chapter Three and in Chapter Four) considering serious objections that have been raised for that account. The skills, composite and motivations models are the three accounts of the nature of virtue that I will consider in this work. My aim when discussing the nature of the moral virtues is to provide a defence of the motivations model.

The distinction between the skills, composite and motivations models of the moral virtues is importantly different from another distinction that has been made in the virtue literature. When focusing on the *reliability* of the virtues – or the extent to which virtues will lead an agent to reliably bring about good states of affairs – the available options can be divided up between three further approaches.<sup>14</sup> An *externalist* account of the virtues will say that reliable effectiveness in bringing about good consequences is a defining feature of those traits that are rightly viewed as being virtues. A prime example of such an account is provided by Driver (2001). Alternatively, an *internalist* account will

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<sup>14</sup> This distinction is the focus of Baehr (2007).

make no demands regarding the reliable production of good consequences when giving an account of the virtues. Instead, the virtues will primarily be defined by certain internal features, such as positive motivations or desires. The account of moral virtues provided by Slote (2001) is suggested by Baehr as a prime example of the internalist approach.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a *mixed view* attempts to combine these two aspects by suggesting that a virtue involves both the presence of valuable internal states (such as motivations) and reliable effectiveness in producing good consequences. Zagzebski (1996) provides perhaps the best example of an account of this sort.

The distinction between the skills, composite and motivations models will sometimes match up nicely with the distinction between the externalist, mixed and internalist accounts, respectively. For example, those who think that the virtues must be reliable in producing good outcomes may be expected to be more sympathetic to the idea that virtues are (or can be) skills, on the plausible assumption that skills allow an agent to be more effective in achieving positive goals. Furthermore, those who favour the internalist model tend to highlight the value of certain positive motivations or desires, and so can be expected to be more inclined towards either the composite or motivations models (on which motivation is a central feature of all virtues). Given the overlapping concerns involved in these two debates, it will often be possible to take arguments or ideas present in the debate between externalist, mixed and internalist approaches and apply them in the debate between the skills, composite and motivations models. However, it is worth also bearing in mind that the match between these two ways of carving up the terrain is not perfect. For example, a defender of the mixed view need not accept that all virtues consist of motivations plus skills, and a defender of an externalist account need not accept that all virtues will consist of a skill or set of skills. In general, it will be possible to hold a position in the externalist/mixed/internalist debate without being committed to any particular view in the debate between the skills, composite and motivations models. Even if it is sometimes possible to marshal the arguments used in one of these debates when evaluating options in the other, it will be important to

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<sup>15</sup> Baehr (2007) p. 457

remember that these two ways of dividing up (some of) the options regarding the nature of the moral virtues are not a perfect match.

Explaining and clarifying these important distinctions should be helpful in avoiding possible misunderstandings regarding the claims that are made later on in this work. I will now conclude this introduction by providing a brief overview of the content and main aims of each of the chapters in this thesis.

### **3. OVERVIEW**

The thesis begins with the evaluation of the skills model of the moral virtues. This model states that the possession of a moral virtue consists in the possession of a particular type of skill (or set of skills). Reasons in favour of the skills model are provided by considering the similarities between virtues and skills that have been highlighted in recent work from Julia Annas and Matt Stichter. I argue that three existing objections to the skills model are inconclusive at best, before then providing an important additional objection to that view. This objection reveals the inability of the skills model to accommodate the importance of an agent's motivations when determining whether or not they possess a given moral virtue. The chapter concludes that the skills model is not a sufficient account of the moral virtues, and that we have good reason to consider an account that places greater importance on an agent's motivations.

Chapter Two sets out the composite model of the moral virtues on which a moral virtue consists of a motivational component as well as a component of relevant cognitive skill(s) or know-how. This chapter aims to demonstrate that the skills component is not necessary by considering two objections to the composite model. The first objection builds on Julia Driver's claims regarding the "virtues of ignorance", and setting out this objection requires an extended discussion of the candidate moral virtue of modesty. The second objection to be considered claims that requiring an intellectually demanding component of relevant skill is problematically elitist. The two objections presented in this chapter provide good reason to consider the merits of an account of the nature of

the moral virtues on which virtue possession does not require a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how.

Chapter Three moves on to discuss the motivations model of the moral virtues on which a moral virtue consists of a deep motivation towards a characteristic end. Having set out the account in detail, three serious objections are then considered. These objections are: (i) the claim that the motivations model is incompatible with the idea that virtuous agents will be reliably successful when acting; (ii) the claim that the motivations model is unable to accommodate the intuitively appealing distinction between “actual” virtues and “natural” virtues; and (iii) the claim that accepting the motivations model amounts to the celebration of irrationality. I provide detailed responses to each of these objections with the aim of showing that the motivations model is a legitimate contender in this debate and a live option for those working in virtue theory.

Chapter Four focuses mainly on the candidate moral virtue of courage. I first explain why the trait of courage is problematic for accounts such as the motivations model, before then arguing that this trait may also be problematic for other accounts of the virtues. I then propose an alternative understanding of the trait of courage on which courage is *not* a moral virtue. Courage ought instead to be viewed as an *enabler* for moral virtue. Having explained this approach, I then demonstrate why understanding courage in this way would allow us to avoid the problems posed by that trait.

Having argued that moral virtues consist of deep motivations towards characteristic ends, it then becomes important to identify which deep motivations ought to actually be accepted as moral virtues. In Chapter Five, I consider two influential attempts which identify virtuous traits with reference to some further concept: Driver’s consequentialist approach and Hursthouse’s neo-Aristotelian approach. By arguing against these approaches, I provide justification for considering the merits of the rival *fundamental value* approach. I set out and argue against Slote’s care-based version of such a view in order to suggest that we have good reason to consider an approach on which kindness and justice are viewed as fundamentally virtuous traits.



In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I expand on and defend the suggestion that kindness and justice be viewed as fundamentally virtuous traits. This suggestion is best understood from within an overall cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. On such an account, kindness and justice are viewed as *fundamental* (or cardinal) moral virtues, while any other moral virtues are *subordinate* in the sense that they can be understood as simply restricted forms or exercises of either kindness or justice. I defend this suggestion in two ways. Firstly, I explain how the proposed account leads to plausible understandings of other candidate moral virtues, such as honesty, modesty and compassion. Secondly, I explain how the account would allow us to resolve two important problems that currently face all virtue theorists: the “conflation problem” and the “enumeration problem”. This chapter will demonstrate that there is good reason to revive a cardinal understanding in relation to the moral virtues.

Having provided an introduction to the issues covered in this work, as well as an overview of each chapter, it is now possible to move on to the first issue to be addressed: the issue of determining the nature of the moral virtues. The first account to be explained and evaluated is the skills model of the moral virtues.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE SKILLS MODEL OF THE MORAL VIRTUES

### 0. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to consider the prospects of the skills model of the moral virtues. This view states that possessing a moral virtue is simply (or primarily) a matter of possessing particular skills or know-how. Such a view was common in the ancient world, with Plato and the Stoics counting among the early adherents of the skills model.<sup>1</sup> However, fewer contemporary theorists have explicitly endorsed this account of the moral virtues, preferring instead to endorse the weaker claim that moral virtues are “like” or “analogous to” certain skills.<sup>2</sup> And yet, there remains good reason to consider the stronger claim. First of all, the idea that skills or abilities can be virtues is treated as a live option in contemporary debates regarding the *intellectual* virtues.<sup>3</sup> If the skills model is a plausible contender regarding one class of virtue then it is worthwhile considering whether or not it can also account for the moral virtues. Secondly, recent work in the virtue literature has highlighted many similarities between virtues and skills. As will be set out below, these similarities make the view that virtues *just are* skills understandably appealing. And thirdly, it is worth noting that many of the objections that have been raised for the skills model are less than compelling. If the arguments against this view are weaker than has been thought, then this also provides us with some reason to re-consider its plausibility. For these reasons, it will be worthwhile to consider the prospects of the skills model of the moral virtues.

It will be useful to clarify the general *type* of skill to which the skills model will typically refer. As will become clear below, those theorists who provide support for the skills

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<sup>1</sup> Annas (2003)

<sup>2</sup> As will be explained in detail below, Julia Annas is one of the most forthright defenders of the skills model, often preferring the stronger claim that moral virtue *just is* a kind of skill. Those who compare possession of moral virtue to possession of *perceptual* skill (the ability to *see* what is required or what action would be best) can also be classed as being at least sympathetic to this view. For example, see Jacobson (2005) and also McDowell (1998). (Note: McDowell’s view is discussed at some length by Jacobson, who provides reason to suppose that McDowell is less than fully committed to the truth of the perceptual account, seeing it as merely a useful metaphor. I will not engage with this issue here.)

<sup>3</sup> Virtue epistemologists who are classed as “reliabilists” are more likely to think that intellectual virtues are (or can be) skills. For one influential example, see Sosa (2007) Lecture 2. For more on the distinction between reliabilists and responsibilists within virtue epistemology, see Code (1984) and Baehr (2011) Section 1.2.1.

model typically have in mind *practical* skills such as playing the piano, being an expert chef, or playing tennis. At the same time, however, the skills being referred to must not be mindless and will instead require an important aspect of cognitive engagement. This will become clearer when discussing the work of Julia Annas, below.<sup>4</sup> Even at this preliminary stage, however, it ought to be made clear that the skills being appealed to are *cognitive* or *intellectual* in the sense that they involve engaged reasoning and practical knowledge on the part of the agent. We are not here talking about purely physical “skills” such as the ability to tie shoelaces, or to intentionally dislocate a shoulder.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, an agent will not count as possessing a particular *cognitive* practical skill purely in virtue of being able to bring about the same results as someone who does possess that skill. The ability to respond to explicit and constant instruction such that you can press the correct keys on a piano or accurately return a serve in tennis is not sufficient in order for you to class as having the relevant cognitive skill.<sup>6</sup> To possess such a skill is to *know how* to act in response to certain situations and perhaps to be able to consciously *identify* relevant features of a situation as requiring a skilled response. The (expertly) skilled tennis player, in this more cognitive sense of a practical skill, is not simply able to return a serve when given explicit instruction about where to stand and how to swing their racquet. Instead, they will be able to anticipate opposing strategies, know how to read their opponent and to manoeuvre them around the court, see opportunities to attack rather than defend, and so on. It is this more cognitively demanding understanding of practical skill (or know-how) that is typically taken to be fruitfully compared to moral virtue.

In this chapter I will first set out some of the possible benefits of accepting the skills model. This will involve highlighting the similarities between virtues and skills that have been suggested in the recent virtue literature. I will then discuss three objections which have been raised for the skills model, showing why these objections are not conclusive. Finally, I will present an alternative argument against the skills model and show why attempts to amend the view in order to respond to this objection will not be successful.

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<sup>4</sup> And see Annas (2011) pp. 17–20.

<sup>5</sup> Annas contrasts the skills she is interested in with “physical skills” in Ibid. p.29.

<sup>6</sup> I will use “cognitive skill” as shorthand for “cognitive practical skill” throughout.

We ought to conclude that the skills model does not provide a sufficient account of the nature of the moral virtues.

## 1. VIRTUES AND SKILLS

The skills model of the moral virtues gains plausibility as a result of the apparent similarities that exist between virtues and (certain) skills. Even before considering the more theoretical insights offered in the recent virtue literature, it is possible to grasp some of the intuitive similarities that exist. As was mentioned in the General Introduction, virtues are taken to be persistent internal traits of an agent. We would not expect an agent to suddenly lose their virtue, or to have possession of a genuine virtue in a way that was sporadic or fleeting. The same is intuitively true of skills. An expert golfer will not be expected to suddenly lose their ability to find the fairway off the tee any more than a virtuously kind agent would be expected to suddenly lose their virtuous kindness. Similarly, virtues are taken to be features of an agent for which they can be appropriately praised. Again, this matches up nicely with the possession of a skill. Just as we might praise a student for exhibiting the virtues of conscientiousness or open-mindedness when interacting with their classmates, we might also praise a sprinter for their fluid technique or praise a cellist for their immaculate bowing. It is clear, then, that our pre-theoretical understandings of both virtues and skills suggest certain similarities. This lends some weight to the idea that moral virtues *just are* a type of skill. And further similarities have been highlighted in the recent virtue literature.

In recent articles, Matt Stichter has discussed similarities in the development of virtues and skills.<sup>7</sup> That there is some similarity in this respect will come as no surprise to those familiar with Aristotle's famous claim that "men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."<sup>8</sup> However, Stichter sets out a particular *model* for the development of a practical skill and shows how this model is plausibly mirrored

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<sup>7</sup> See Stichter (2007) and Stichter (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 29 [1103<sup>a</sup>32-<sup>b</sup>25]

in the development of moral virtues.<sup>9</sup> On “the Dreyfus account” of skill development (stemming from the work of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus), skill possession can be divided into five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer, and expert.<sup>10</sup> At the earlier stages of development, an agent will tend to rely on very simple rules. For example, a novice chef will tend to rely on simple instructions from a cookbook regarding how to prepare certain ingredients, and at what temperature they ought to be cooked. As the agent gains more experience, they will become comfortable using less simple and more context-sensitive rules. For example, the chef may follow different rules for cooking the same ingredient depending on whether the accompanying dishes will be sweet or savoury, or depending on the taste preferences of their guests. As the rules become more complex and context-sensitive they will tend to pick up on increasingly subtle aspects of the situation, and it may be difficult for the agent to determine which rule best applies to their particular circumstances. As a result, the agent will be forced to make a choice regarding which rule to follow, and the competent performer will be one who is able to make this choice and to accept responsibility for the consequences of having done so. This willingness to recognise themselves as responsible for the outcomes of their various choices will mark an important step in the agent’s development. As Stichter explains:

These outcomes provide the feedback that a person needs in order to improve her skill. The feedback, if positive, reinforces making that choice again in a similar situation. The feedback, if negative, prompts the person to make a different choice in that situation.<sup>11</sup>

As the agent gains further experience and receives further feedback on previous choices, they may come to no longer make those choices consciously. A chef who has prepared a particular ingredient for use alongside a particular accompaniment on many different occasions will not feel the need to consciously reflect on which rule to follow when they are confronted with those same ingredients in future. Instead, they will instinctively perform those actions which have consistently led to positive feedback in the past. The

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<sup>9</sup> Stichter (2011) pp. 77–82

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 77

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 78

greater the range of the agent's experience, the fewer situations in which they will be required to consciously consider specific rules for action. Through exposure to a sufficient level of experience and feedback, it will be possible for the agent to develop into "an expert who sees intuitively what to do without applying rules and making judgements at all... [who] spontaneously does what has normally worked and, naturally, it normally works."<sup>12</sup> Stichter believes this to be a plausible account of how an agent can progress from novice to expert regarding a particular skill, and that the same model can be applied to the development of a moral virtue.

When we consider an agent developing in their moral sophistication, it is plausible to imagine them starting out at the corresponding novice level whereby they are dependent on very simple rules. Perhaps the beginner regarding honesty will learn "Don't Lie" as a simple rule, before going on to learn more detailed and context-sensitive variations. They will learn that lying is not the only way of being deceitful, and that other ways ought to be avoided also. They may learn that the wrongness of lying can vary from context to context, and perhaps even that lying need not be avoided in every situation. As they encounter increasingly complex situations it may become difficult for them to judge how severe the prohibition on lying actually is, or how best to exemplify the virtue of honesty in their particular circumstances. Ultimately, they will have to make a decision on such matters, and they will learn to alter their future actions depending on past experiences. At the final stage of development they will begin to see intuitively how they ought to act, without any need to consciously apply rules or seriously consider alternatives. At this stage they will be an expert regarding honesty. This is the picture of developing a moral virtue that would mirror the picture of skill development endorsed by Stichter. If we think that this picture is a plausible one then the similarity in terms of development will provide support for the skills model of the moral virtues.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) p. 235 (Quoted in Stichter (2011) p. 77)

<sup>13</sup> One possible challenge to Stichter's account is that it is not obvious in the case of virtue development what the relevant feedback conditions will be. In the case of cookery skills, for example, the feedback will be fairly straightforward to pick up on. If the result is appetising then this will count as positive feedback and if it is not then this will count as negative feedback. A learner will be able to recognise which is which and adjust future behaviour accordingly. In the case of the virtues it is more difficult to see how the learner will be able to recognise whether their actions have

While Stichter has argued that there are similarities in how virtues and skills are *developed*, Julia Annas has argued that there are similarities in how they are *exercised*. Indeed, Annas is one of the most forceful advocates of the view that “virtue is, or is importantly like, a skill”, and much of what she says on this topic can be used to support the stronger claim that virtues *are* skills.<sup>14</sup> A first point to note regarding the exercise of a skill, according to Annas, is that it differs from routine performance. In the case of a mere habit or routine, the agent will be able to perform the action in a mindless, mechanical way. The example given by Annas is of driving a familiar route, where the driver may not always be fully conscious of what they are doing and may simply find themselves at their destination when the journey is over.<sup>15</sup> The exercise of a skill, on the other hand, will require conscious and intelligent engagement on the part of the agent. In the case of a skilled pianist, for example, “The way she plays exhibits not only increased technical mastery but increased intelligence – better ways of dealing with transitions between loud and soft, more subtle interpretations of the music, and so on.”<sup>16</sup> Annas believes that, just as the exercise of a skill will be responsive to the agent’s engaged intelligence, so too will the exercise of the virtues:

A central feature of routine is that the reaction to the relevant situation is always the same, which is why routine can be depended on and predicted. But practical skill and virtue require more than predictably similar reaction; they require a response which is appropriate to the situation instead of merely being the same as that produced in response to other situations... Virtues, which are states of character, are states that enable us to respond in creative and imaginative ways to new challenges. No routine could enable us to do this.<sup>17</sup>

The first similarity, according to Annas, between the exercise of a virtue and the exercise of a skill is that both require that the agent be engaged in an intelligent and flexible way

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been successful or not. I will not further consider this possible objection to Stichter’s specific account.

<sup>14</sup> Annas (1995) p. 240 (See also Annas (2011).)

<sup>15</sup> Annas (2011) p. 13

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 14

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 15

with their situation.<sup>18</sup> The second similarity that Annas proposes involves how the exercise of both skills and virtues *feels* to the agent. Annas suggests that the exercise of a skill is something that the agent will find enjoyable, and that this is also true of the exercise of a virtue.<sup>19</sup> To defend this claim, Annas quotes work from psychology which suggests that people enjoy themselves most not when they are relaxed or at rest but when they are engaged in intelligent and skilful activity.<sup>20</sup> For example, the expert pianist will experience both an enjoyable level of focus and an enjoyable loss of self-consciousness when engaging their skill in the performance of some challenging piece of music: “The activity is experienced as unhindered, unselfconscious, and effortless.”<sup>21</sup> And Annas believes that this is also an apt description of activity involving (fully developed) virtue. The virtuous agent will not experience temptation to act unvirtuously and so their actions will be similarly effortless and unimpeded by internal conflict. Here Annas is in agreement with Aristotle. “Honest actions [for example] will be experienced by the mature honest person in the ‘flow’ way; however complex and hard to navigate the circumstances are, there is no felt resistance to acting honestly, no interference with the direct having of honest responses.”<sup>22</sup> In this way, the exercise of a virtue is thought to mirror the exercise of a skill. The agent who exercises a virtue has a “flow” experience in the sense that they take enjoyment from the activity at the same time as being simultaneously focused and lacking in self-consciousness. If we add the similarities proposed by Annas regarding how virtues and skills are exercised to the similarities proposed by Stichter regarding how they are developed, then this supports the claim that the skills model of the moral virtues is worthy of consideration.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gilbert Ryle has also highlighted the differences between mere habits on the one hand and intellectual capacities, such as the “higher-grade dispositions of people”, on the other. See Ryle (1949) pp. 42–45.

<sup>19</sup> Annas (2011) Chapter 5

<sup>20</sup> The work relied on is Csikszentmihalyi (1991).

<sup>21</sup> Annas (2011) p. 72

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 75

<sup>23</sup> While Annas and Stichter agree about the merits of comparing virtues and skills, it is perhaps worth noting that they disagree on what exactly the proper account of a skill will be. For example, Annas (2011, pp. 19–20) claims that possession of a skill requires that the agent be able to understand and articulate their reasons for acting as they do. Stichter (2007, pp. 186–188) disagrees with this claim. Such differences in the specific accounts favoured by these theorists will not impact upon the more general discussion of this chapter.



The similarities between virtues and skills that have been highlighted in the recent literature provide support for the skills model of the moral virtues. In the next section I will consider three objections to that model with the aim of showing that these objections are not conclusive. Some further objection will be required in order to show that the skills model is not a sufficient account of the nature of the moral virtues.

## **2. OBJECTIONS TO THE SKILLS MODEL**

The skills model says that to possess a moral virtue is to possess a type of cognitive skill or know-how, or perhaps some collection of related skills. If we are to accept, for now, a standard list of the moral virtues, then this would mean that traits such as honesty, compassion, justice and courage ought to be understood in terms of skills. For example, on this model the virtue of honesty might consist in the ability to identify situations as demanding honesty, being able to determine what action will best exhibit honesty in these circumstances, and, perhaps, being able to explain to others why honesty was demanded and why this particular action was the best to perform. Such skills are similar to those listed by Linda Zagzebski as being involved in other commonly accepted moral virtues:

A just person understands what justice demands and is good at perceiving the details of a particular situation that are relevant to the application of rights and duties. A compassionate person understands the level of need of persons around him and can predict the effects of various forms of expressing compassion on persons with different personalities.<sup>24</sup>

Might possessing these kinds of skills be sufficient for possession of the corresponding virtue? In this section I will consider three arguments against this view. My aim is to demonstrate that these objections to the skills model are not successful, and that some other objection will be required.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 134

<sup>25</sup> Earlier versions of some of the arguments discussed in the following two sections appeared in my Masters dissertation, submitted at the University of Glasgow in 2011.

## 2.1 ARGUMENT 1 - DIFFERENT CONTRARIES

In *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski argues that skill possession is not sufficient for the possession of a moral virtue.<sup>26</sup> Some of the arguments that Zagzebski provides are her own, while others are taken from the work of other theorists. However, Zagzebski herself does not believe that all of the arguments that she considers are successful. The need for some further objection to the skills model can be demonstrated by revealing the inconclusiveness of arguments endorsed by Zagzebski.

A first objection from Zagzebski argues that virtues and skills must be distinct due to the fact that they have different contraries.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, the contrary of a virtue must surely be a vice – the opposite of a compassionate agent being an agent who is cruel, for example. However, the contrary of a skill, according to Zagzebski, is simply a lack of skill. The opposite of the skilled baker is simply someone who lacks the relevant skills. Given that the opposite of a virtue is a vice, and that a vice is not simply a lack of virtue (or of skill), virtues and skills must have different contraries. And this leads to the conclusion that virtues must not be skills.

However, this first objection to the skills model is not successful. The reason for this is that a defender of the skills model could plausibly claim that Zagzebski is mistaken when saying that the opposite of a skill is simply a lack of skill. For example, consider the skill of good public speaking. When looking for the opposite of someone who is a skilled public speaker, one option would be to consider an agent who simply lacks the relevant skills and who is otherwise average. This agent will not be the true contrary. That role will be held by an agent who possesses actual deficiencies which make them further away from being skilled in this regard; someone who is notably monotone, inaudible, and fidgety, perhaps. If this is correct then we ought to reject Zagzebski's claims about the true contrary of a skilled agent. The opposite of a skilled agent is one who possesses actual defects which make them further away from the relevant ideal. And note how this actually fits nicely with the case of the moral virtues, where the opposite of the virtuous agent (the vicious agent) may be taken to possess defects (the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Part II, Section 2.4

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. pp. 112–113

vices) which make them further away from the moral ideal. Given this available response, we have good reason to abandon this argument against the skills model and to consider other possibilities.

## 2.2 ARGUMENT 2 – NECESSARY EXERCISE

A second argument endorsed by Zagzebski has been previously proposed by both Philippa Foot and Gilbert Meilaender.<sup>28</sup> This argument points out that it is possible for a skill to exist as a mere capacity. That is, the possession of a skill is perfectly compatible with the agent failing to exercise that skill. For example, an agent may perfectly well possess the skills involved in being an expert baker while at the same time choosing not to exercise those skills. Indeed, it is generally the case that a skilled agent might even choose to act in a way that suggests the opposite of skill. An agent may nevertheless be a skilled baker even if they choose to bake a horrible birthday cake for someone they secretly dislike. On the other hand, it is taken to be incompatible with the possession of a moral virtue that the agent fails to exercise the trait. If an agent does not act in a compassionate way then this necessarily tells against their possession of the virtue of compassion. If an agent fails to act honestly then they are not virtuously honest. In this way, moral virtues differ from skills and so moral virtues must not be skills. The skills model is incorrect.

A first available response for the defender of the skills model is to suggest that an account of moral virtue possession ought not to be overly demanding. That is, it ought to be compatible with the possession of a genuine virtue that an agent might sometimes fail to live up to the standards expected of the virtuous. If this is correct, then it will be possible to question the claim that failure to act in accordance with a given virtue demonstrates that the agent must not possess that virtue. Consider the following example:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 107 (Zagzebski attributes the argument to Foot (in ‘Virtues and Vices’, which can be found in Foot (2002)) and Meilaender (in Meilaender (1984)).

*Personal Sorrows:* Alex is widely regarded as extremely kind, and generally acts as we would expect a kind agent to act. Alex considers the feelings of others, successfully puts the interests of others before her own interests, spends a considerable amount of time working for charity, and so on. However, on one particular occasion, Alex finds her mood over-clouded by her own personal sorrows, and at this moment she is less sympathetic towards a friend than we might expect from a virtuously kind agent.

In this example, Alex has failed to exercise the virtue of kindness. If virtue possession, unlike skill possession, is incompatible with the agent failing to act in a virtuous way then we must say that Alex does not possess the virtue of kindness. And yet, it does not seem right to say that this incident is sufficient to show that Alex lacks kindness. Those who are sympathetic to the idea that Alex may be a kind agent despite this incident will have to accept that virtue possession is compatible with an agent failing to act on or to exercise the relevant virtue. The stark difference between virtues and skills that is suggested by the ‘necessary exercise’ argument would then have to be denied.

Of course, we might still think that there is *some* difference between virtues and skills in this regard. Even if possession of a virtue is not incompatible with the agent failing to exercise that virtue, we might think that such failure necessarily tells against the *extent* to which the agent possesses the virtue. Alex possesses the virtue of kindness, but the incident involving her friend shows us that she is less kind than someone who would be able to act kindly even in those difficult circumstances. Failure to act on a virtue tells against the extent to which an agent possesses that virtue, and this is not the case for skills. Therefore, there might still be an important difference here between moral virtues and skills.

However, competing considerations can be provided by thinking about the possibility of moral dilemmas. In particular, it is useful to consider a case where different moral virtues appear to point in different directions. One example of such a case is described by Rosalind Hursthouse where we might think that “Honesty points to telling the hurtful, even devastating, truth, kindness and compassion to remaining silent or even

lying”.<sup>29</sup> One concrete example suggested by Hursthouse is “a teacher’s telling a dedicated, mature student that, contrary to his hopes and dreams, he was not capable of postgraduate work in philosophy”.<sup>30</sup> In some of these cases the conflict will be merely apparent and a resolution will be possible. To lie would not really be kind, for example, or the suggested truth would actually mask a more important fact. However, in other cases we will be inclined to say that the clash is very real. The kind act would not be honest or the compassionate act would not be just.<sup>31</sup> In these cases it will not be possible for the agent to act in accordance with both of the conflicting virtues. If they have found themselves in the problematic situation through no fault of their own then we ought not to say that they will necessarily act wrongly. But we also cannot say that the agent who chooses to tell the unkind truth has nevertheless acted kindly, or that the agent who chooses the comforting lie has nevertheless acted honestly. The agent will have failed to act in the way characteristic of one who possesses the neglected virtue. However, given the problematic nature of the situation in which they found themselves, we should not take this as ruling out the possibility that they do in fact possess the neglected virtue, and to an extremely high degree. The agent who chooses the unkind truth may nevertheless possess the virtue of kindness. And, given the problematic nature of the situation, their failure to act in accordance with kindness does not even tell against the extent to which they possess that virtue. The situation was such that, whatever they chose to do, one virtue would be neglected. Given this, their action should not be taken as evidence that their possession of the virtue is deficient. Their failure to act in accordance with the virtue stems not from their inner characteristics but from the external situation in which they found themselves. If this is right, then it will be possible for an agent to fail to act in accordance with a virtue in a way which does not tell against the extent to which they possess that virtue. And this would weaken the suggested argument against the skills model.

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<sup>29</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 43

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 52

<sup>31</sup> These irresolvable cases are accepted as possible by Hursthouse (see Ibid. Chapter 3) and one such example is provided by Michael Slote (2011) pp. 29–30. I will not discuss here Slote’s interesting claim that these examples highlight the existence of what he calls *partial* virtues.

It will be possible to reject this response to the ‘necessary exercise’ objection by simply denying the possibility of irresolvable dilemmas, or of situations in which the virtues point in different directions. Some will be sympathetic to such a move.<sup>32</sup> However, it would be more satisfying if our rejection of the skills model was not dependent upon the resolution of controversial issues such as the impossibility of virtues coming into conflict. If the present objection is dependent on the outcome of such a controversial issue then it will remain inconclusive so long as that issue is unresolved. Rather than attempting to resolve such issues here, we ought instead to look for some alternative objection to the skills model.

### 2.3 ARGUMENT 3 – VOLUNTARY LOSS

Zagzebski also presents an argument taken from the work of Sarah Broadie which aims to highlight a further telling difference between virtues and skills. Broadie states that:

it says nothing against the quality of a skill if its possessor voluntarily lets it go or decides to give it up as no longer worth the exercise. But it is not consistent with virtue that virtue voluntarily be allowed to slide<sup>33</sup>

Here we have another suggested difference between moral virtues and skills which tells against the claim that virtues just are skills. It is perfectly compatible with an agent’s possession of a skill that they would voluntarily choose to let it go – say, to stop practicing the skill and thereby eventually lose it. For example, suppose that an agent decides to stop using, and thereby to lose, their skills as an expert baker in order to instead spend their time on some other pursuit. This does not tell against the level of baking skill that they have at the time of making their decision. On the other hand, the suggestion is that the decision to voluntarily give up the virtue of kindness, for example, would be proof that the agent in question did not truly possess that trait. It is not compatible with the possession of kindness, or any other moral virtue, that the agent

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<sup>32</sup> Those sympathetic to the idea of the ‘unity’ or ‘reciprocity’ of the virtues are more likely to support the idea that virtues cannot conflict. For a detailed discussion of the unity thesis, and of the different rationales for supporting it, see Russell (2009) Chapter 11.

<sup>33</sup> Broadie (1991) p. 89 (This point is discussed in Zagzebski (1996) p. 110.)

would voluntarily let it go. This suggests that virtues differ from skills and so moral virtues must not merely be skills.

A first thing worth saying in response to this argument is that it does not seem to be incompatible with the possession of a virtue that the agent, at least momentarily, *wishes* that they did not possess it. Consider the (surprisingly common) example of a mother whose sense of justice compels her to report her criminal child to the authorities.<sup>34</sup> In such a case we can imagine the mother agonising over the decision and knowing that she could not live with herself if she were to turn a blind eye to the offense or conceal evidence from the police. The mother might say something like “I wish I could just let this go. I wish I didn’t possess this commitment to justice, as my life would be so much easier. But, alas, this is how I am and I must call the police.” Such a case would appear to provide an example of an agent who does possess the virtue of justice (they do, after all, report their own child to the police) but who also wishes that they did not possess that trait. They would (at least in that instant) voluntarily give up the trait if they could. While such examples might tell against the current objection to the skills model to some degree, they will not be enough. While the agent in this example wishes that they did not possess the trait of justice, they ultimately do not choose to give it up. And perhaps if they did forsake justice in order to protect their child this *would* lead us to question how just they were in the first place. Instead, what is required is an example where an agent actually does (or would) choose to give up a moral virtue, but where this does not tell against their actual possession of that virtue.<sup>35</sup> Such an example would allow us to deny the suggested distinction between moral virtues and skills, and therefore show that the current objection is not sufficient.

Consider the following example:

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<sup>34</sup> Examples of such cases are reported every so often in the media. For two examples, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2052930/Mother-turns-in-sons-to-police-for-blinding-man-in-drunken-assault.html#> (accessed 29/06/2012) and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-16658815> (accessed 01/07/2014).

<sup>35</sup> An alternative strategy would be to suggest that some skills *are* incompatible with voluntarily giving them up, and that this is what disproves the suggested distinction between virtues and (all) skills.

*Remarkable Offer.* Teresa typically values the well-being of others and spends a significant percentage of her time working for charity. She also listens carefully when others tell of their worries, and is always on hand whenever a friend or neighbour requires assistance. One day, Teresa is made a remarkable offer. She has the opportunity to improve the lives of a vast number of people. All that she needs to do is step into the “de-virtuifier” machine and a great many benefits will be showered on the general population. Ailments will be lessened; happiness will increase, and so on. At the same time, the machine will weaken Teresa’s kindness to non-virtue status (whatever this requires). If Teresa chooses not to enter the machine then she will be free to go on her way as before.

It seems possible in such a case that Teresa may both possess the moral virtue of kindness and yet (or even because of this) choose to enter the de-virtuifier, thereby sacrificing her virtue. Furthermore, it is plausible that this would be a voluntary choice. No-one will be worse off if Teresa chooses not to enter the machine, and we can stipulate that Teresa herself will not suffer in any way if she chooses to pass up the opportunity. Therefore, Teresa is not being coerced into making the decision. This example suggests that it is compatible with the possession of a genuine moral virtue that the agent may voluntarily choose to give it up. This provides us with a reason to doubt the distinction between virtues and skills that was proposed as a means of challenging the skills model.

The *Remarkable Offer* example provides us with a case where a genuinely virtuous agent might voluntarily and knowingly choose a course of action that leads to the loss of their virtue. This should be enough to show that it is not necessarily the case that virtue is incompatible with voluntary loss, and so virtues are not as different from skills as the present objection to the skills model requires. However, the case of Teresa must be accepted as being somewhat out of the ordinary. Given the fantastical nature of the example, we might worry about the trustworthiness of our intuitions in this case. It is worth pointing out, therefore, that far more common and realistic examples can also be provided. Imagine the virtuous soldier choosing to take part in a just war despite correctly anticipating that the horrors of war are likely to deaden her moral sensibilities. It is part of the tragedy of such a choice that the soldier is knowingly sacrificing a



positive aspect of her character in order to further a just cause. The very virtue that prompts her decision will be lost as a result of that decision. On a more mundane level, we can imagine a virtuously generous prospective parent choosing to have a child despite knowing that the fatigue of parenthood in the early years will render her too tired to always fully satisfy the demands of generosity towards other people. So long as examples of this sort are available, there is no reason to doubt the intuition that is had in response to *Remarkable Offer*. There are cases where a genuinely virtuous agent can choose to perform an action that leads to the loss of their virtue. And this shows us that the proposed distinction between virtues and skills is not strong enough to rule out the acceptability of the skills model of the moral virtues. The objections considered in this section have all proven to be inconclusive.

### **3. REJECTING THE SKILLS MODEL**

The arguments provided by Zagzebski have failed to show that moral virtues are not (merely) skills. And yet, Zagzebski is nevertheless right in rejecting the skills model. I will now provide one further objection to the skills model in order to properly demonstrate the insufficiency of that view. This objection reveals the importance of focusing on an agent's *motivations* when determining whether or not they possess a moral virtue.

According to the skills model, moral virtues consist of cognitive practical skills. That is, moral virtues are like practical skills (such as playing tennis or playing the violin), where these skills are taken to involve engaged reasoning and practical knowledge on the part of the agent (as opposed to being merely mindless or routine). An agent who possesses cognitive practical skill in playing tennis is not one who can merely follow instructions about where to stand and when to swing their racquet. They will instead be able to anticipate their opponent's strategy, know when to attack and when to defend, and so on. When applied to specific moral virtues, the skills model suggests that (for example) the virtue of compassion will consist of something like the set of skills involved in understanding the needs of those around you and in working out how best to respond to those needs (in your particular circumstances). The virtue of justice would consist of

something like the set of skills involved in being able to identify situations as involving potential injustices and then working out how best to act in order to avoid any unfair outcomes (in your particular circumstances). However, this model leaves out something important about the nature of moral virtues. This can be shown by first focusing on a notable feature of practical skills.

It will be useful to consider two examples mentioned in the work of Joel Kupperman. Kupperman discusses the examples of a skilled mechanic who “delights in inner fantasies of wheels falling off and brakes failing” and of a skilled mathematician who enjoys “deliberately miscalculating and spoiling proofs”.<sup>36</sup> These examples are particularly instructive for highlighting a problematic feature of skills. It is possible to possess a given skill, and to a very high degree, while at the same time being non-instrumentally motivated to act in a way that runs directly contrary to the utilising of that skill. Kupperman’s mechanic possesses the skills necessary for car repair and maintenance while at the same time being motivated to see cars that are damaged and malfunctioning. Kupperman’s mathematician possesses the skills necessary for producing accurate proofs and yet at the same time is motivated to produce inaccurate proofs and to make mathematical errors. While the particular motivations involved in these examples are somewhat unusual, the general feature of skills that they point towards is not. It is entirely possible for an agent to possess a skill while at the same time being motivated in a way that runs directly contrary to the utilising of that skill.

This general feature of skills is extremely damaging for the skills model of the moral virtues. Whereas the possession of a skill is compatible with a variety of motivations, including a non-instrumental motivation that runs directly contrary to that skill, the same is not true of the possession of a moral virtue. An agent does not possess the moral virtue of kindness if they are (non-instrumentally) motivated to harm other people. An agent does not possess the moral virtue of honesty if they are (non-instrumentally) motivated to deceive. The skills model cannot explain this fact. It is possible to possess the skills involved in understanding the needs of those around you

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<sup>36</sup> Kupperman (1991) pp. 103–105

and how best to satisfy those needs while at the same time being motivated to ensure that the needs remain unsatisfied. But it is not possible to possess the virtue of compassion while having this same motivation. Similarly, it is possible to possess the skills involved in being able to identify situations as involving potential injustice while at the same time being motivated to ensure that those injustices actually come to pass. But it is not possible to possess the virtue of justice while being motivated in this way. Possession of a skill is compatible with motivations of this sort while possession of a moral virtue is not. Therefore, moral virtues must not merely consist in the possession of cognitive skill(s) or know-how.

The problem with the skills model is that it fails to make demands regarding an agent's motivations when determining whether or not the agent possesses a given moral virtue. This leaves open the possibility that an agent will count as being virtuously kind despite being motivated to harm others, or that an agent will count as being virtuously just despite being motivated to act unfairly. Such results are highly counter-intuitive and suggest that we ought to reject the skills model. In fact, these considerations suggest that we ought to reject any model of the moral virtues that fails to demand a necessary motivational component of an appropriate sort. If the skills model cannot be amended in ways that are sensitive to this problem then we will have sufficient reason to reject that model.

#### **4. AMENDING THE SKILLS MODEL**

The proposed objection to the skills model highlights the importance of motivation in determining whether or not an agent possesses a given moral virtue. One understandable response to this objection, therefore, would be to adopt an account of the nature of the virtues that demands the possession of a particular motivation as well as the possession of relevant cognitive skill(s) or know-how. There is more than one way of making such a move. A first way would be to adopt the view whereby the possession of a moral virtue consists of the possession of cognitive skill(s) plus the possession of a motivation that is specific to the trait in question. To make this move would be to abandon the skills model in favour of what I will be referring to as the

composite model. The prospects for this model will be the focus of Chapter Two. A second way of responding to the proposed objection would be to adopt the view whereby the possession of a moral virtue consists of the possession of a special type of cognitive skill, where this special type of skill necessarily involves some general motivation. If there are skills that necessarily involve some general motivation, and if we say that the moral virtues consist of skills of this special type, then it will be possible to retain the skills model while at the same time acknowledging that motivation plays a role in the possession of moral virtue. We can refer to the idea that moral virtues consist of this special type of cognitive skill as the amended skills model.

If we return to the recent literature on this topic, it is possible to find support for the amended skills model. Theorists who are interested in the connection between virtues and skills have argued that there exist certain skills which necessarily involve the possession of a general motivation. When comparing virtues and skills, Stichter goes on to distinguish between two different types of skill. Drawing once more on the Dreyfus account of expertise and skill possession, Stichter distinguishes between “simple” skills and “subtle” skills.<sup>37</sup> Subtle skills are taken to be those that are more difficult to acquire, such as playing the piano, while simple skills are those involved in basic tasks such as crossing the road. Stichter proposes that possession of a subtle skill will require that the agent also possess a motivation, and the motivations suggested as candidates for this role are the “motivation continually to improve” and the “commitment to excellence that manifests itself in persistence and in high standards for what counts as having done something right”.<sup>38</sup> The idea that certain skills require the possession of a motivation is supported by Annas. Annas suggests that those skills which are most like virtues will all necessarily involve a “drive to aspire”.<sup>39</sup> If there are skills which necessarily involve a general motivation then the objection that the skills model fails to acknowledge the importance of motivation in the possession of moral virtue may well be weakened. As Stichter makes the point:

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<sup>37</sup> Stichter (2011) pp. 80–81

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 81

<sup>39</sup> Annas (2011) pp.16–19

if practical skills can already be divided into two categories based on motivational considerations, then it is unlikely that any special motivational elements of virtue would constitute a sufficient reason for thinking that virtues cannot be skills.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to be clear about the dialectic here. The objection to the skills model is that it fails to account for the fact that virtue possession requires the possession of a certain motivation (or at least the absence of certain negative motivations). In response to this, the claim cannot simply be that both virtues and skills will be easier to develop if the agent possesses a motivation to improve or to aspire. The claim must be that the possession of both virtues and (at least some) skills is incompatible with the absence of this motivation.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the claim cannot be that the possession of both skills and virtues involves the addition of a more specific motivation such as the drive to aspire *in this particular domain* or to improve *in this particular way*. If this is what is meant then we will have a version of the composite model (on which each virtue consists of specific skills plus a specific motivation) and not of the skills model. Therefore, if the amendment to the skills model is to address the objection raised above, then the claim must be that both virtues and (at least some) skills necessarily involve the kind of general motivation suggested by Stichter and Annas, and that this is sufficient to account for the importance of motivation in the possession of a moral virtue. I will now suggest that we have good reason to reject this response.

## 5. REJECTING THE AMENDED SKILLS MODEL

How are we to assess the claim that both virtues and (at least some) skills involve a general motivation such as a “drive to aspire” or “the motivation continually to improve”? A first response is to point out that this does not actually appear to be true of skills. The possession of a skill, even of a subtle skill such as playing the piano, does not require that the agent have a motivation to improve. One obvious example would be where a child is forced by an over-bearing parent to constantly practice and improve

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<sup>40</sup> Stichter (2011) p. 80

<sup>41</sup> Annas is certainly willing to make this claim, while also accepting that it is a demanding account of the nature of skills. See Annas (2011) p. 18 (and also footnote 3 on that page).

their piano playing while at the same time despising the entire process. It would seem possible for the child to possess the skill of playing the piano even while they lack the motivation to improve or to aspire. Similarly, we can imagine an agent who was once greatly motivated to improve and who went on to become an expert baker. Even if this agent subsequently loses the motivation to improve, they will not simultaneously cease to possess their subtle baking skills. It therefore seems to be the case that skill possession does not require the suggested general motivation, and so the claims of the amended skills model should not be accepted.

However, this response could simply be rejected by a defender of the skills model. When considering some of the more demanding aspects of her account of skills, Annas demonstrates a willingness to accept certain counter-intuitive implications of that account. For example, when discussing the drive to aspire, Annas states that “Where the aspiration to improve fails, we lapse into simple repetition and routine. This is a very demanding feature of a skill.”<sup>42</sup> Annas would rather deny that any trait possessed without the accompanying motivation is a skill than accept that the possession of a skill does not require such a motivation. Similarly, when discussing further controversial aspects of her account of skills, Annas says that “this certainly flouts our everyday intuitions about what is and what is not a skill. But once again we must ask, ‘Does this matter?’”<sup>43</sup> For Annas, it is not important whether or not there are skills which fail to match up with the account being suggested. So long as there exist *some* skills which have the suggested features then it will be possible to say that virtues are just like these skills, and the skills model could then be defended as having merit. Of course, it is not entirely clear that any skills *do* require the possession of a general motivation to improve or to aspire. One tactic, therefore, would be to maintain that no such skills exist and that, therefore, the claims of the amended skills model ought still to be rejected. However, it would be better if some other grounds for dismissal were also available.

These grounds can be uncovered by reflecting once more on plausible candidate moral virtues such as honesty or compassion. The above objection to the skills model revealed

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Annas (1995) p. 233

that possession of the relevant skills is not sufficient for the possession of a moral virtue. An agent can possess the ability to identify situations as requiring honesty, as well as having the ability to work out which action will best exemplify honesty in this particular situation, and yet fail to possess the virtue of honesty. This was shown by considering an agent who possessed these skills while also possessing a non-instrumental motivation to deceive others. It should now be noted that possession of these skills plus the possession of a general motivation to improve or to aspire will also not be sufficient for moral virtue. The agent who possesses the skills relevant to honesty plus a general motivation to improve may nevertheless fail to possess the virtue of honesty. This will be the case, for example, if the agent does not consider the development of an honest character to be an improvement or if they possess an even stronger motivation to be deceitful. Similarly, an agent who strongly (and non-instrumentally) desires to cause suffering will not possess the moral virtue of compassion, regardless of how skilled they happen to be at recognising needs and predicting the likely outcomes of possible actions, or how motivated they happen to be to improve or to aspire. Therefore, the combination of a relevant skills component plus a general motivation is not sufficient for the possession of a moral virtue. The amended skills model ought to be rejected.

It is worth pointing out that the general motivations to improve or to aspire also do not appear to be *necessary* for the possession of a moral virtue. An agent's honesty or courage does not appear to depend on their having a general motivation for self-improvement. It has more to do with how they respond to different situations and, perhaps, what their reasons are for responding in the way that they do. Similarly, an agent may very well be kind without at the same time believing it necessary, or even possible, to improve themselves. An agent who is satisfied with or resigned to their current levels of ability or status could nevertheless possess the virtue of kindness. As could a god for whom improvement would not be possible. The general motivation to improve or to aspire is not necessary for moral virtue. Of course, it was mentioned above that Stichter suggests a second possible motivation: the motivation to meet "high standards for what counts as having done something right". But it is equally true that an agent can be kind without possessing any *general* commitment to high standards. We might expect the kind agent to

possess a commitment to high standards regarding kindness, but he need not be committed to high standards generally. A kind agent may have relatively low standards when it comes to bravery or honesty, or, less controversially, regarding what counts as hygienic or humorous or as a good football team. There is nothing about virtue possession that requires a general commitment to high standards across the board, and so even this motivation (when read in the general sense) is not necessary for virtue possession. What this suggests, then, is that the amended skills model will not be successful. Instead, we ought to consider an account whereby moral virtues involve a motivation that is specific to the given virtue. If we combine a specific motivation with a component of relevant cognitive skill(s) then we will be in line with the composite model of the moral virtues. We ought to now turn our attention to that approach.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has considered the prospects of the skills model of the moral virtues whereby a moral virtue consists solely of the cognitive practical skills relevant to that trait. This account has been found wanting as it fails to be sensitive to the importance of motivation in determining whether or not an agent possesses a given moral virtue. Therefore, we ought to move on to consider accounts of the moral virtues on which a motivational component features more prominently. One such account is the composite model of the moral virtues.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE COMPOSITE MODEL OF THE MORAL VIRTUES

### 0. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the skills model of the moral virtues and concluded that it fails to give sufficient weight to the importance of an agent's motivations when determining whether or not the agent possesses a given moral virtue. The aim of this chapter is to consider the prospects of the composite model. On this view, a moral virtue consists in the possession of cognitive skill(s) or know-how *as well as* a characteristic motivation. I will first use suggestions present in the work of Linda Zagzebski in order to demonstrate what a version of the composite model would look like, and why we might think that it marks an improvement on the skills model. I will then consider two main objections to the idea that a component of cognitive skill is necessary for the possession of a moral virtue. The first objection stems from the work of Julia Driver who argues that the existence of "virtues of ignorance" can be used to tell against certain conceptions of the moral virtues. Evaluating the strength of this first objection will require considerable focus on the nature of Driver's prime example of a virtue of ignorance: the trait of modesty. I will then propose a second objection which focuses on the charge that the composite model is problematically elitist. I will argue that the force of these objections provides us with good reason to consider an alternative understanding of the moral virtues.

### 1. PRELIMINARIES – CLARIFYING THE COMPOSITE MODEL

The skills model of the moral virtues was committed to maintaining the primacy of a skills component over any other possible component in an account of virtue. This meant that even the amended skills model of Chapter One was only able to accommodate a non-virtue-specific motivation, such as a general motivation to improve or to aspire. The composite model, on the other hand, faces no such requirement and so is free to posit virtue-specific motivations as being a part of every moral virtue. On the composite model, a moral virtue consists of just such a virtue-specific motivation plus the possession of the cognitive skill(s) or know-how that are relevant to that motivation.

In order to evaluate the benefits of (and possible objections to) the composite model, it will be useful to have a version of that model to work with. In *Virtues of the Mind*, Linda

Zagzebski argues for an account of the virtues that also involves two separate components. It will be worthwhile for our purposes to examine the way in which Zagzebski explains her view. The main claim from Zagzebski is the following:

A virtue therefore has two main elements: a motivational element, and an element of reliable success in bringing about the end (internal or external) of the motivational element.<sup>1</sup>

In order to fully understand this view, it will be necessary to look at both components in some detail. Regarding the motivational component of virtue, Zagzebski provides the following example:

I propose that a virtue has a component of motivation that is specific to the virtue in question. So the virtue of benevolence involves the tendency to be moved by benevolent motives, which is to say, it involves a disposition to have characteristic emotions that direct action in a particular direction, probably the well-being of others.<sup>2</sup>

Zagzebski's understanding of the motivational component is in-keeping with the composite model. Moral virtues involve the possession of a motivation that is specific to the virtue in question and which directs the agent in a particular direction. This will be important when showing that the account is an improvement on the skills model.

However, it is less clear that Zagzebski's account agrees with the composite model in proposing a required skills component. The first quote from Zagzebski refers to an element that will make the agent reliably successful in bringing about the specific end highlighted by the motivational component. This element *might* consist in the possession of relevant skill(s) or know-how, as this is one way in which an agent could become reliably successful in achieving virtuous ends. If so, the account suggested by Zagzebski would be a prime example of the composite model. Virtues would be viewed as consisting of a virtue-specific motivation plus the skill(s) or know-how relevant to that motivation. Indeed, there are several places in Zagzebski's work where it looks like she

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<sup>1</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 137

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 132

is sympathetic to the idea that her proposed success component consists in the possession of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. For example:

I conclude that the “success” feature of a virtue is a component distinct from the motivational component. Virtue possession requires reliable success in attaining the ends of the motivational component of the virtue. *This means that the agent must be reasonably successful in the skills and cognitive activities associated with the application of virtue in her circumstances.*<sup>3</sup>

And the idea that particular skills or abilities will be required is also suggested when Zagzebski goes on to discuss specific candidate moral virtues:

A just person understands what justice demands and is good at perceiving details of a particular situation that are relevant to the application of rights and duties. A compassionate person understands the level of need of persons around him and can predict the effects of various forms of expressing compassion on persons with different personalities.<sup>4</sup>

Passages like this suggest that we ought to understand the success component posited by Zagzebski as a component of relevant cognitive skills. If so, Zagzebski’s account will be a prime example of the composite model. However, there are other places in Zagzebski’s work where she explicitly denies this reading. For example:

we would normally expect a person with virtue to develop the associated skills. Still, it is possible for her to have a virtue and to lack the corresponding skills.<sup>5</sup>

Typically, moral virtues have many skills associated with them, although there may be moral virtues that have no corresponding skills.<sup>6</sup>

These quotes suggest that it would be a mistake to understand Zagzebski’s success component as being similar to the skills component required by the composite model.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 133–134 (emphasis added)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 134

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 116

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 113

Indeed, there are several different ways in which we could understand the demand for a success component:

*The Composite Model Reading:* The success component consists of the cognitive skills and know-how related to the end of the motivational component.

*The Pluralist Reading:* The success component consists of whatever is required in order to make the agent reliably successful in attaining the end of the motivational component. This will sometimes require skills, but not always.

*The Reliabilist Reading:* The success component is empty, and merely places a condition on which motivations can be virtues. Only those motivations which actually lead the agent to reliably attain the relevant ends are virtues.

I will not here be arguing in favour of the *Composite Model Reading* over the other two readings, either as an interpretation of Zagzebski or in terms of independent plausibility. Indeed, it is clear that something like the *Reliabilist Reading* is much more common in the secondary literature on Zagzebski.<sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that the latter two readings are at odds with other commitments present in Zagzebski's work. On the *Pluralist Reading* the nature of different virtues will differ, depending on what happens to be required in order to make the agent successful in attaining their virtuous ends. The nature of specific virtues may even differ for different people, on the assumption that different people in different circumstances will require the addition of different attributes in order to ensure reliable success. The *Pluralist Reading* would therefore be in conflict with Zagzebski's desire to present a uniform account of the nature of the virtues and to avoid the possibility of different virtues being of different types.<sup>8</sup> On the *Reliabilist Reading*, the success component simply places a condition on which motivations can be virtues, and so may actually leave us with a version of the motivations model. However, by demanding that a given motivation *must* lead to reliable success, this reading makes whether or not a given motivation is a moral virtue a hostage to luck. Many external factors could intervene to determine whether a given motivation leads to reliable success and, therefore, whether a given motivation is or is not a moral virtue. This would be at odds with Zagzebski's belief that it ought not to be

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Baehr (2011) pp. 132–138, and Greco (2000) pp. 179–184.

<sup>8</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 135

the case “that whether a trait is a virtue or a vice is an accidental feature of it”.<sup>9</sup> Of course, these brief remarks are not intended to prove that the *Composite Model Reading* is the best account of Zagzebski’s position, or that Zagzebski actually holds a version of the composite model. The setting out of these three possible readings is instead intended to clarify precisely what is demanded by the composite model, which is the focus of this chapter. By using the two-component structure suggested by Zagzebski and then distinguishing the *Composite Model Reading* of the second component, we can come to a better understanding of the composite model itself.

The main claims made by the composite model should now be clear. On this account, moral virtues consist of a motivation towards a characteristic end plus the cognitive skill(s) or know-how associated with reliable success in attaining that characteristic end. For example, the virtue of compassion might consist of a motivation to alleviate suffering plus certain cognitive skills such as the ability to identify instances of suffering and to work out the most effective means to alleviate it. There is good reason to consider such an account. Firstly, the general idea is in accordance with the Aristotelian claim that moral virtue requires both “aim[ing] at the right mark” and having the practical wisdom that allows one to “take the right means”.<sup>10</sup> The motivational component of the composite model ensures that virtuous agents will be directed towards the right ends, while the skills component performs the role of practical wisdom. In *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Daniel Russell explains that an Aristotelian account will view practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as involving a suite of practical abilities or know-how.<sup>11</sup> Practical wisdom consists of abilities such as “comprehension” (“something like ‘being quick on the uptake’”), “sense” (“an ability to see things from another’s point of view”), and “*nous*” (a “developed problem-solving ability resulting from experience”).<sup>12</sup> It is because practical wisdom consists of such abilities that it allows the virtuous agent to reliably attain the ends of specific virtues. This account of practical wisdom also helps to de-mystify that capacity by demonstrating that it involves skills and abilities that we understand fairly well. As Russell says:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 92–93

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 155 [1144<sup>a</sup>7–9]

<sup>11</sup> Russell (2009) pp. 18–25

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 20–22

since phronesis is like a skill in the structure of its reasoning, phronesis is no mysterious faculty but of a piece with intellectual abilities we already find familiar.<sup>13</sup>

This understanding of practical wisdom as consisting of (a suite of) cognitive or intellectual skills has been endorsed by other prominent neo-Aristotelians.<sup>14</sup> The supporter of an Aristotelian understanding of moral virtue will therefore be sympathetic to an approach, such as the composite model, on which moral virtues consist of a motivational component plus a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. Throughout the revival of virtue ethics (and virtue theory) in recent times, the majority of writers have taken inspiration from the work of Aristotle.<sup>15</sup> We therefore have good reason to consider the prospects of an account that is in-keeping with a key Aristotelian idea.

Further reason to focus on the composite model is provided by the fact that this account of the virtues will be able to explain the very same similarities between virtues and skills that were taken to provide support for the skills model. In the previous chapter, I set out Matt Stichter's arguments regarding the similarities between the development of virtue and the development of skill. If virtues *just are* skills then this similarity in development can be easily explained. However, the similarity can also be explained if we accept that virtues *partly consist* of skills. On the composite model, possessing a given moral virtue will necessarily involve possessing certain relevant skills, and it is therefore unsurprising that someone will need to go through a similar process when developing their virtue as they would when developing a skill. The same point holds for the similarities between the exercise of a virtue and the exercise of a skill that were highlighted by Julia Annas. On the composite model, moral virtues partly consist of cognitive skill(s) or know-how and so it is unsurprising that the exercise of a virtue mirrors the exercise of such a skill. In short, the composite model can explain the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Rosalind Hursthouse's work in Hursthouse (2006b) pp. 285–309 and Hursthouse (2006) p. 103. We also saw in the last chapter that Matt Stichter makes favourable comparisons between virtues and skills, and Stichter takes himself to be following Aristotle in this regard. See Stichter (2007).

<sup>15</sup> See Annas (2003) pp. 15–33, and Hursthouse (2006) p. 100.

similarities between virtues and skills that were taken as evidence in support of the skills model. The same considerations give us good reason to now consider the prospects of the composite model.

Additional support for the composite model also comes from the fact that it will be able to avoid the objections that were raised for the skills model in the previous chapter. The skills model was unable to rule out the possibility of an agent possessing a moral virtue while also possessing a non-instrumental motivation running contrary to that virtue. That is, it was unable to deny that a virtuously honest agent could be (non-instrumentally) motivated to deceive, or that a virtuously kind agent could be (non-instrumentally) motivated to harm others. However, this will not be a problem for the composite model. This model places demands on the motivations that are possessed by a virtuous agent. For example, on the composite model someone with the candidate moral virtue of honesty must possess something like the motivation to avoid deception, and this will be incompatible with also having a (non-instrumental) motivation to be deceitful. Someone with the candidate moral virtue of kindness must possess something like the motivation to protect and promote well-being, and this will be incompatible with a (non-instrumental) motivation to harm others. The composite model therefore avoids the main objection faced by the skills model. By retaining the benefits of the skills model (the ability to explain similarities between virtues and skills) while avoiding the drawbacks (the inability to rule out the compatibility of virtue with problematic motivations) the composite model looks to be a strong contender.

These considerations demonstrate that the composite model of the moral virtues is worthy of our attention. I will now highlight two objections to this model with the aim of showing that we have good reason to consider an alternative approach. The first objection stems from the work of Julia Driver, and will require an extended discussion of the candidate moral virtue of modesty.

## 2. OBJECTION 1 – THE VIRTUES OF IGNORANCE<sup>16</sup>

The arguments against the skills model in Chapter One were intended to demonstrate that cognitive skill or know-how is not *sufficient* for moral virtue. The arguments in the current chapter aim to cast doubt on the claim that such skill or know-how is *necessary* for moral virtue. One well-known attempt to deny that cognitive excellence is necessary for moral virtue is provided by Julia Driver. In *Uneasy Virtue*, Driver argues that there exist virtues which actually require a *lack* of cognitive skill or know-how, and that these traits can be classified as “virtues of ignorance”.<sup>17</sup> If correct, this would tell against intellectualist accounts of the virtues which demand such a component (including the composite model currently under consideration).<sup>18</sup> As her prime example of a virtue of ignorance, Driver suggests the trait of modesty.<sup>19</sup> In order to determine whether or not the virtues of ignorance pose a genuine threat to the composite model, it will be necessary to consider the account of modesty that is provided by Driver. If this account is acceptable then we will be able to ask whether or not Driver is right to claim that the trait of modesty tells against accounts such as the composite model. If Driver’s account of modesty is not acceptable then it will be necessary to spend time coming up with an alternative account before then asking about implications for the composite model. We must begin, therefore, with an assessment of Driver’s account of the trait of modesty.

### 2.1 DRIVER’S UNDERESTIMATION ACCOUNT OF MODESTY

The trait of modesty provides Driver with her prime example of a virtue of ignorance. And the ignorance that is involved in modesty is ignorance of one’s own true level of worth or ability. As Driver points out:

What the analysis comes down to is this: for a person to be modest, she must be ignorant with regard to her self-worth. She must think herself less deserving, or less worthy, than she actually is (though it will turn out that how she makes the error is relevant). Since modesty is generally considered to be a virtue, it would seem that this virtue rests upon an epistemic defect.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The material in this section draws upon my ‘Modesty as Kindness’, forthcoming in *Ratio*.

<sup>17</sup> Driver (2001) Chapter 2 (See also, Driver (1989) and Driver (1999).)

<sup>18</sup> Driver (2001) Chapter 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. pp. 16–28

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 19



The caveat about the importance of *how* the ignorance comes about has the purpose of ruling out the possibility of agents who have simply never considered the issue of their own worth, but who would be disposed to rank themselves very highly if prompted.<sup>21</sup> Such agents are currently ignorant, but their disposition suggests that they are not truly modest. Instead, the modest agent is one who *systematically* underestimates their own worth or ability, and who would be disposed to do so even in the face of evidence to the contrary. In Driver's own words: "What I want to say about modesty is that it is not enough to be ignorant of self-worth; one also has to be disposed to be modest."<sup>22</sup> That is, one has to be disposed to continue to rate oneself less highly than would actually be deserved.

If Driver's account of modesty is correct then the modest agent will necessarily lack the skills involved in accurately assessing their own worth or abilities, or the value of their own accomplishments. They will continually get things wrong in this regard, even when they have access to relevant evidence. The picture that emerges of the virtuous agent is very different from the one proposed by the composite model, whereby a virtuous agent is one who possesses various cognitive skills rather than one who lacks them. Therefore, if Driver is correct (and if we accept that modesty is indeed a moral virtue) then this will be damaging for the composite model of the moral virtues. We ought to now evaluate the account that Driver has provided in order to assess the extent of the challenge posed for the composite model.

Driver provides us with three broad reasons to accept the underestimation account of modesty. Firstly, Driver points out that it is a "desired feature of any account of modesty" that it can explain the strangeness of the phrase "I am modest".<sup>23</sup> We would find it strange to hear someone making this claim, and the underestimation account can explain why. Modesty requires not only that the agent underestimate their self-worth, but also that they are not doing so knowingly. If they are aware of what they are doing then it is not true modesty: "I can be modest, but I cannot *know* it".<sup>24</sup> And this makes

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp. 20–21

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 19

the phrase “I am modest” self-defeating. If the statement was true then I would not be able to knowingly assert it.

The second broad consideration in favour of the underestimation account is that it makes it easy to provide a corresponding account of *false* modesty. To be falsely modest, according to this account, is to understate your own self-worth or ability while actually having a perfectly accurate understanding of these matters. It is thereby deceptive in some way. As Driver says, “There is something ‘put on’ about false modesty that gives it the flavour of insincerity”.<sup>25</sup> And this account also tells us something about why false modesty is considered an undesirable trait. One explanation is that we dislike insincerity, and so the aspect of deception is what tells against the value of false modesty (understood in this way).<sup>26</sup> A second explanation is provided by Driver who points out some possible undesirable consequences of this trait. The falsely modest agent has been misleading people, and when this is uncovered it will have a negative social impact. People will feel “patronized or condescended to” and so the impact of the trait will be a reduction in good feeling.<sup>27</sup> The underestimation account thereby provides a corresponding account of false modesty, as well as an explanation for why false modesty is an unappealing trait.

A third and final possible benefit of any proposed account of modesty is that it be able to provide an explanation for the positive value of that trait. In accordance with Driver’s general account of what makes a trait a virtue, the trait of modesty is valuable because of the good outcomes that it produces.<sup>28</sup> These outcomes are produced because a modest agent is less likely to provoke envy from other people. As Driver explains:

The modest person has a charm similar to that of the unaffected person. Someone who doesn’t compare his appearance to those of others around him and, even better, seems unaware of it seems less likely to provoke an envious response in others. Thus, modesty involves ignorance, and the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>26</sup> This issue will be considered in more detail below.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 27

<sup>28</sup> Driver’s general account of the moral virtues will be considered in detail in Chapter Five.

ignorance is valuable because of what it indicates about a person's ranking behavior.<sup>29</sup>

The modest agent is ignorant of their own level of worth or ability, and this suggests that they will not be prone to problematic ranking behaviour. They seem less likely to go around comparing themselves to others, and avoiding such behaviour can be expected to have an ameliorating social impact. This, according to Driver, explains the value of the trait of modesty. With this in mind, it appears that the underestimation account of modesty is able to provide three important benefits. It can: (i) explain the strangeness of the phrase "I am modest"; (ii) provide a plausible corresponding account of false modesty; and (iii) explain why the trait of modesty is valued. It will be important to keep these benefits in mind if and when we come to consider an alternative to Driver's account. For now, the apparent provision of these benefits speaks in favour of the underestimation account of modesty.

Despite these supposed benefits, there is good reason to reject the underestimation account. I will focus on two main concerns: (1) the worry that the proposed explanation for the value of modesty is unconvincing; and (2) the worry that the conditions that have been suggested for genuine modesty are not sufficient. Regarding the first of these worries, Driver has argued that, on her view, modesty can be expected to reduce instances of envy in a society, and that this provides an explanation for why we value the trait. However, there is good reason to doubt these claims. First of all, there is good reason to think that the prevalence of modesty, on Driver's account, would actually lead to an *increase* in envy within a society. As Daniel Statman has pointed out, the underestimation account suggests that modest agents will consider themselves to be less worthy or less able than they actually are. If modest agents are more likely to think that other people are better than they are, then those modest agents will also be more likely to be envious of others.<sup>30</sup> Even if a modest agent is unlikely to *provoke* envy, they seem more likely to be envious themselves. And this calls into question the claim that modesty is valued because it makes envy less likely in society.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 27

<sup>30</sup> Statman (1992) p. 424

The proposed explanation for the value of modesty is further called into question once we realise that a tendency to reduce cases of envy is not sufficient to make us value a particular trait. This is especially clear when we think again about the trait of false modesty. As understood by Driver, the behaviour of the falsely modest agent could be the same as that of the truly modest agent. The only difference between the two is that the truly modest agent has an inaccurate self-opinion whereas the falsely modest agent will have an accurate (or even inflated) self-opinion. Therefore, the social impact of both genuine modesty and effective false modesty can be expected to be identical. And if we are to understand the value of modesty as stemming from its impact in society, then we must also accept the equal value of effective false modesty. And yet, intuitively, we do not value effective instances of false modesty. It may be possible to avoid this conclusion by instead appealing to the inherent moral value of truthfulness (or the inherent moral disvalue of deceptiveness), but it is not clear how convincing such an appeal would be, or whether the appeal would be compatible with Driver's overall consequentialist approach to the virtues. Furthermore, additional traits which appear likely to reduce cases of envy but which are not considered to be valuable have been proposed elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, even if we accept Driver's claim that the trait of modesty has a positive impact due to the reduction in cases of envy, we still have good reason to question the adequacy of the proposed explanation for the value of modesty.

The second and perhaps more damaging problem facing the underestimation account is that the suggested conditions for genuine modesty are not sufficient. Someone might satisfy the requirements proposed by the underestimation account and yet, intuitively, not class as a genuinely modest individual. In order to demonstrate this, we require an example where the agent genuinely underestimates their own self-worth or ability (and would continue to do so in the face of competing evidence) but where the agent still does not count as truly modest. The beginnings of such an example can be taken from Driver's own work. When making the point that her proposed account is one of *underestimation* rather than *low* estimation, Driver provides the example of Albert Einstein: "if Albert Einstein viewed himself as a great physicist, just not the greatest

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<sup>31</sup> G. F. Schueler points out that a merely average sporting ability or a "dull wit" is unlikely to provoke envy in others, but this does not lead us to consider such traits valuable. See Schueler (1997) p. 469.

physicist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – that’s modesty.”<sup>32</sup> But suppose we now add to this example. G. F. Schueler asks us to consider someone who judges that they are a great scientist but who nevertheless (systematically) underestimates their own worth. They believe themselves to be the second greatest scientist of the century while in fact they are the greatest.<sup>33</sup> Such an individual will meet the proposed conditions for modesty. However, they will continue to meet those conditions even if they are incredibly boastful about what they take to be their true level of ability. We can imagine them cruelly ridiculing colleagues for their relative lack of ability, or demanding that others show them respect in various humiliating and distasteful ways. As long as such an agent continues to underestimate their own worth or ability (and would do so in the face of contrary evidence) then they will meet Driver’s conditions for being modest. And yet, it does not seem right that the boastful scientist should be considered a modest agent. The underestimation account of modesty is not sufficient. It will be important to diagnose the failing that is highlighted by the boastful scientist example, and to re-consider the example when evaluating any alternative account.

We are interested in Driver’s account of the candidate virtue of modesty because of Driver’s claim that this virtue requires a lack of cognitive skill and so can act as a counter-example to accounts of the moral virtues such as the composite model. However, we have now seen that Driver’s own account of the trait of modesty is unappealing. Rather than giving up on the objection to the composite model that is suggested by Driver, we ought instead to try and come up with an alternative account of the trait of modesty. Having done this, we will be able to reassess Driver’s claim that modesty can act as a counter-example to accounts such as the composite model.

One thing that is important for our purposes here is to correctly diagnose the failing in Driver’s account that allowed for the damaging boastful scientist counter-example. And the correct diagnosis can be achieved by noting that rival accounts will be subject to similar counter-examples so long as they focus entirely on features internal to the agent. As Driver says, on her account “Modesty is something that is internal; it is basically an

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<sup>32</sup> Driver (2001) p. 19

<sup>33</sup> Schueler (1997) p. 470

attitude of ignorance that one has towards oneself.”<sup>34</sup> And so long as an account remains purely internal, variants of the boastful scientist case will be possible. This is true for various rival accounts, including those which demand that the agent not overestimate their worth; those which demand that the agent acknowledge the equal moral worth of all humans; and those which demand that the agent regularly compare themselves against the standard of idealised agents.<sup>35</sup> In each case it will be possible for the agent to be both proud and obnoxiously boastful about some ability that they do possess. Perhaps, then, we would do better in avoiding the problems that afflict the underestimation account by tackling this issue in a direct way. What is needed is an external requirement – a restriction on how the truly modest agent will behave in their interactions with other people.<sup>36</sup> If our account of modesty stipulates that the modest agent be disposed not to brag or boast or ridicule others for their relative lack of ability, then we can be confident in ruling out problems analogous to the boastful scientist objection.

However, this stipulation will not be enough. We can easily imagine cases where an agent is disposed not to boast or to ridicule others but where we do not believe that the agent is truly modest. This will be the case when an agent just doesn’t care about the opinions of other people, or when an agent’s aim is to trick others in order to reap the benefits of a good reputation. An acceptable account of modesty will therefore need to include both a behavioural restriction and some other requirement in order to identify cases of genuine modesty. Only then will we have an acceptable account of modesty that we can use to evaluate the “virtues of ignorance” objection to the composite model. I will now propose such an account.

## 2.2 MODESTY AS KINDNESS

We now have four requirements that must be met by any successful account of modesty. When providing her own account, Driver highlighted three benefits that it would be desirable to provide: (i) an explanation for the strangeness of the phrase “I am

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<sup>34</sup> Driver (2001) p. 19

<sup>35</sup> I have in mind here the theories proposed by Flanagan (1990), Ben-Ze’ev (1993), and Brennan (2007), respectively.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Ridge argues for the necessity of such a requirement in Ridge (2000) pp. 271–271. A basic dispositional approach is also mentioned (and rejected) in Driver (2001) Chapter 2.

modest”, (ii) a plausible corresponding account of false modesty, and (iii) an explanation of why genuine modesty can be considered a valuable trait. We can add a further requirement to this list: (iv) the account should include a behavioural restriction in order to avoid the boastful-scientist-type objections that are problematic for other accounts. I will now propose an account of modesty that is able to satisfy these requirements.

The trait of modesty ought to be considered as closely related to the more widely accepted moral virtue of kindness. It is at least part of the nature of kindness that the kind agent will be concerned to protect and promote the well-being of others. The modest agent is one who shares this concern and who is influenced by it in the way that they present themselves. The *modesty-as-kindness* account (MK) can be set out in the following way:

To be modest is to be disposed to de-emphasise your accomplishments and positive attributes in a way that is sensitive to the potential negative impact on the well-being of others, where this disposition stems from a concern for that well-being.

This account is able to satisfy the four conditions set out above. The account can (i) explain why there would usually be something strange about the phrase “I am modest”. Given that modesty is taken to be a positive trait, the agent who utters this phrase would be providing evidence that they lack a disposition that is a key part of genuine modesty. However, MK does tell us that the phrase is not *necessarily* incompatible with genuine modesty, as Driver appears to have thought. If the agent does not consider modesty to be a valuable trait or if they believe themselves to be in a situation where no-one’s well-being would be negatively affected (for example, in a job interview or among close friends) then the statement could perfectly well be compatible with genuine modesty. This seems to be the correct result. And MK also appears to get things right with regard to (ii) giving an account of false modesty. To possess (the persistent trait of) false modesty is to possess the same disposition regarding how you present your accomplishments/attributes but where this disposition stems from the wrong kind of motivation. Examples will include the motivation for personal gain (for example,

downplaying some positive attribute in order to ingratiate yourself with your boss, or to encourage the general public to like you so that they will buy your autobiography).

Perhaps the most important benefit of MK is that it (iii) allows us to fully explain why modesty has been taken to be (and is) a valuable trait. First of all, the account suggests that modesty will have the very same social benefits that Driver claimed were provided by modesty on the underestimation account. The modest agent avoids bragging and boasting about their achievements out of a concern for the well-being of those who might do badly by comparison. One side-effect of this will be that the modest agent is less likely to provoke envy and dislike in others, and so will have the ameliorating social impact that was described by Driver. In addition to this, however, we can now also see that the possession of modesty is indicative of a kind and caring nature on the part of the modest agent. The modest agent is concerned to protect and promote the well-being of others through their self-presentation and so will be likely to also possess the virtue of kindness. Indeed, it would be possible on this view to see modesty as simply an expression or manifestation of the more fundamental virtue of kindness. Such a view of modesty as a restricted form of kindness would make it clear why modesty is a morally valuable trait, and would explain the intuition that modesty should appear on a list of the moral virtues.<sup>37</sup> But even a more conservative view (on which modesty is merely good evidence for the separate virtue of kindness) will be able to explain that intuition. Either way, the modesty-as-kindness account is able to adequately explain the value of modesty.

The three benefits suggested by Driver have been provided by the modesty-as-kindness account. Furthermore, by focussing on how the modest agent presents themselves to others, MK is able to (iv) avoid the boastful-scientist-type examples that are problematic for rival accounts. And this feature also allows MK to provide one further benefit. One interesting use to which the term “modest” has sometimes been put is as a description of someone who dresses conservatively and in a way that seeks to conceal their body from others. This usage can be explained by MK. Modesty is a matter of being sensitive in your self-presentation out of a concern for the well-being of others. And there is

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<sup>37</sup> We will have cause to return to the idea of certain virtues being restricted forms of other virtues (and to the trait of modesty in particular) in Chapter Six.



more than one way in which the failure to be “modest” in one’s dress may have been thought likely to negatively affect the well-being of others. Most obviously, the failure to dress “modestly” might generate feelings of either disgust or inadequacy in others. In addition to this, in societies where sexual thoughts are judged sinful, the failure to be “modest” in one’s appearance may be considered damaging for encouraging others into sin. Indeed, the fact that this usage of the term has become less frequent may be connected to a reduction in such understandings of sin. MK gains further credibility by being able to explain this usage, in addition to being able to provide the other benefits listed above.

We therefore have an account of modesty that is, *prima facie*, plausible. However, before using this account to re-evaluate the threat posed to the composite model, it is important to do more to demonstrate its acceptability. In order to further support the use of MK, and in addition to highlighting the benefits that have already been listed, it will be useful to consider some possible objections to the account and to show that responses to these objections are available. Once this task is complete, sufficient justification will have been provided for using the modesty-as-kindness account when determining whether or not the trait of modesty poses a challenge to the composite model of the moral virtues.

### 2.3 POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO MK – (A) HIGH OPINION

A first criticism that might be levelled at the modesty-as-kindness account is that it allows for the modest agent to have a high opinion of themselves. As long as the agent is disposed to present themselves in a way that is sensitive to the possible negative impact on the well-being of others, and as long as this disposition stems from a concern for that well-being, then the agent can think very highly of their own accomplishments or attributes and still be classed as modest. Consider a variation on the boastful scientist. A proud scientist may share with the boastful scientist the belief that their own work is very impressive indeed. But as long as they are motivated to downplay their impressiveness whenever failing to do so would harm the well-being of others, the proud (but kind) scientist can be counted as modest. Do we really think that having a high opinion of yourself is consistent with genuine modesty? It turns out that this is

actually a matter of wide consensus within the literature on modesty. For example, Driver's underestimation account allows for a modest agent to have an extremely high opinion of their own worth as long as their assessment is slightly less positive than is actually deserved.<sup>38</sup> And this is also a feature shared by a large number of the accounts put forward by rivals of Driver.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this is enough to show that it is not widely considered to be the case that having a high opinion of yourself is a barrier to possessing genuine modesty. Some people do have genuinely impressive attributes or accomplishments, and awareness of this should not automatically render the agent immodest. The scientist who uncovers a cure for some significant illness does not lose the potential for modesty upon realising the importance of their accomplishment. Roger Federer could perfectly well be modest despite being fully aware of the evidence that shows him to be more talented than almost anyone who has ever played tennis. In short, an agent can recognise their own high level of accomplishment while still being genuinely modest. MK is no worse off in allowing for this possibility.

#### 2.4 POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO MK – (B) INACCURATE OPINION

In responding to the first possible objection regarding high opinion, I appealed to other accounts of modesty in order to show that MK is in line with the common consensus. In doing so, one important difference between MK and some of the other accounts was obscured. MK allows for the modest agent to have a high opinion of themselves that is not an accurate reflection of their true level of accomplishment or ability. That is, not only can the modest agent have a *high* opinion of themselves, the modest agent can even have a high opinion of themselves that is *inaccurate*. And this may appear to be a more worrying problem for the proposed account. There will be many (in the literature and beyond) who do not believe that a genuinely modest agent can go around overestimating themselves. To make matters worse, it is possible to generate a rival account that avoids this problem. All that would be required is to amend MK by adding a requirement that the modest agent have the ability to accurately evaluate their own

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<sup>38</sup> Driver (2001) p. 19

<sup>39</sup> For example, Flanagan's (1990) non-overestimation account allows an agent to think very highly of themselves so long as they do not overestimate their own value – high but accurate self-evaluation is perfectly fine (see p. 424–425). Ben Ze'ev (1993) asks for the agent to view their fundamental human worth as similar to that of other people – but this is consistent with viewing your human worth very highly, as well as with viewing your specific accomplishments and attributes very highly (see p. 237). And Ridge's (2000) right reasons account makes no demands regarding the agent's self-evaluation.

attributes and accomplishments.<sup>40</sup> Call the amended version of modesty-as-kindness which requires this addition ‘intellectualised modesty-as-kindness’ (IMK). It seems clear that this account will retain many of the benefits that I have claimed are provided by MK. Intellectualised modesty-as-kindness therefore looks like a strong contender. And if we have the intuition that overestimation of self is incompatible with genuine modesty then we will have every reason to accept IMK and to reject my proposed account. The challenge, then, is to show that genuine modesty is indeed compatible with overestimation and that, therefore, we ought not to amend the modesty-as-kindness account.

In order to meet this challenge, I want to consider two different types of case. First of all, and as is often the case, things can be made clearer by imagining a brain-in-a-vat. Such a being will receive all of the same kinds of experience as a normal person but these experiences will be artificially created for them by scientists. In reality they are just a brain floating in a vat. In such a case, a great many of the brain’s beliefs will be inaccurate. For example, the brain-in-a-vat may evaluate themselves as being an exceptionally gifted break-dancer, and their available evidence may seem to back-up this self-assessment. But the truth of the matter, of course, is that the brain-in-a-vat is not able to break-dance. They are significantly overestimating their own abilities.<sup>41</sup> And yet, it does not seem correct to say that the brain-in-a-vat is incapable of modesty in this case. It would be overly harsh (as well as incorrect) to inform the brain that, not only can it not break-dance, but it could never have been modest about it either. As long as the brain is disposed to present their break-dancing ability in a way that is sensitive to the well-being of others, and the brain is motivated out of a concern for that well-being, then we have every reason to say that the brain is genuinely modest regarding (what it takes to be) its ability to break-dance. Indeed, even if it was revealed that we are all in fact brains-in-vats, this fact alone should not lead us to question the modesty of any of

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<sup>40</sup> Such an account would be similar to one that has recently been proposed by Irene McMullin (although on her account the accurate self-evaluation appears to play a more primary role by actually generating the agent’s desire to avoid harm to others). See McMullin (2010).

<sup>41</sup> This example would need to become significantly more complicated if we accept David Chalmers’ view that there is a sense in which envatted beings could truly possess such abilities, as well as possessing positive attributes such as lovely eyes or an impressive physique. It would take us too far from our main focus to discuss these possible metaphysical complications. See Chalmers (2005).

those people who were previously accepted as possessing the trait. If this case is convincing (and if we believe that the brain could indeed be modest) then we ought to deny the claim that genuine modesty is incompatible with overestimation and dismiss the current objection to the modesty-as-kindness account.

The second type of case that I want to consider in response to the overestimation objection is one where the inaccuracy in the agent's judgements is much less widespread. Instead of a case such as the brain-in-a-vat example, we can instead consider a situation where a simple miscalculation or misremembering leads an agent to overestimate some accomplishment. Imagine a restaurateur who believes herself to have played a major role in catering for a party of five hundred people and who is proud of having accomplished this feat. The restaurateur, however, is careful in how and when she advertises her accomplishment. She listens politely when others tell of having catered for three hundred people and does not feel the need to belittle that (lesser) achievement. When colleagues complain of having to deal with (a mere) two hundred customers she holds her tongue and refrains from phrases such as "You think two hundred is bad?! *I* once catered for a party of five hundred!" And when she is pressed for details of the event she is sure to acknowledge the contribution of others who were working on that fateful day. In short, the restaurateur is disposed to de-emphasise her accomplishment out of a concern for the well-being of others, and is motivated by that well-being. The restaurateur is a paragon of modesty. And we should not change our assessment of her even if we find out that she has misremembered and the actual number of customers served was four hundred and fifty, or even four hundred. Her modesty lies in how she was disposed to act based on what she took her level of accomplishment to be, rather than in her accuracy when assessing that accomplishment. An agent can perfectly well be modest about what they take their level of accomplishment or ability to be, even if the true level is somewhat lower. The proposed account of modesty-as-kindness is no worse off in allowing for this possibility. Therefore, we ought to dismiss the current objection to MK and resist the suggested move to IMK.

The above cases have shown that it is possible to possess genuine modesty despite having an inaccurate high opinion of your own accomplishments or abilities. However, perhaps this is not enough. Even if we now accept that there are *some* cases where overestimation is compatible with genuine modesty (and so the move to IMK would be a mistake), isn't there also something suspicious about certain cases of this type? Consider the philosopher who always grants a higher credence to the truth of their own theories, but who is nevertheless disposed to act in ways that conceal this fact. Can such an agent be considered truly modest? In order to answer this question, more detail regarding the case will be required. First of all, we need to clarify the agent's motivation for concealing their belief that their own theories are generally superior to others. If the disposition stems from a desire to be well-liked or to gain a promotion then MK will say that this agent lacks modesty; they are being falsely modest. Genuine modesty requires that the agent be motivated by a concern for the well-being of others. Secondly, we need to confirm whether or not the agent is correct when thinking that their theories are generally superior. If they are then we will have a case of high but accurate opinion and we have already seen that MK (as well as many other theories) will rightly tell us that such an agent can indeed be modest. Thirdly, we ought to ask whether or not the agent has strong evidence for their evaluation, even if it is inaccurate. If they do then this might make the case similar to the two that were detailed above and I have already argued that we have good reason to accept those as cases of genuine modesty. Therefore, if the philosopher example is to significantly differ from those previously discussed, it must have three features: the agent must be motivated by a concern for the well-being of others, the agent must be overestimating the general superiority of their own theories, and the agent must lack good evidence for their self-evaluation. With these features in place we need to ask whether or not MK would class this agent as genuinely modest and whether or not that verdict is acceptable.

It seems clear that MK is bound to classify the agent in this case as genuinely modest. They are disposed to be sensitive to the well-being of others when presenting what they take to be their level of accomplishment, and we have stipulated that they are motivated by a concern for that well-being. How then can we explain the suspicion that the philosopher (who wrongly and without good evidence believes their own theories to be

superior) does not deserve to be classed as truly modest? One possibility is that the willingness to believe in one's own superiority without good evidence indicates that the agent is being unkind when they evaluate other people. As an account that views modesty as closely related to kindness (and possibly even as a restricted form of kindness), MK can agree that we are justified in being suspicious about the agent's modesty. Alternatively, it is possible that our suspicion is being caused by some other failing. The agent certainly appears to possess certain epistemic vices that would make us want to criticise their character, and it is possible that we simply misdiagnose their failing as a failing of modesty. Finally, it is possible that more work needs to be done to clarify the precise relationship between the trait of modesty and the trait of humility. It is often assumed that these two traits are one and the same, and this would explain why cases of a lack of humility (like the philosopher in our example) are assumed to be cases of a lack of modesty. If we instead reject the assumption that modesty is identical to humility, then we can accept the verdict of MK that the philosopher is being modest, while explaining the mistaken intuition to the contrary. As long as at least one of these explanations for our intuition in the case of the overestimating philosopher is plausible (appeal to evidence of a lack of kindness, appeal to an epistemic failing, or appeal to a distinction between modesty and humility) then we can happily accept the judgement of MK in such a case. This fact, coupled with the points made above, should lead us to deny that MK faces any serious threat from cases of inaccurate self-evaluation.

## 2.5 POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO MK – (C) DECEPTION

We have been considering objections to the modesty-as-kindness account in order to support the justifiability of using this account of modesty when evaluating a possible challenge to the composite model. It has been shown that MK should not be considered vulnerable to cases of high self-evaluation or to cases of inaccurate self-evaluation. A final objection that I want to consider is that the proposed account attributes genuine modesty in cases where an agent is being purposely deceptive. I have suggested that modesty is compatible with the agent having a false view of their own level of ability (like the brain-in-a-vat), but it might be thought that modesty is incompatible with having an *accurate* view of such abilities. To know very well how impressive you are while sometimes presenting yourself as being less impressive is deceptive. The

disposition to do so is therefore an unappealing one, even when motivated by a concern for the well-being of others. And if the disposition being described is unappealing, then it either cannot be the correct account of modesty or it will have shown us that modesty must not be a moral virtue.

This objection can also be dismissed. First of all, it is not clear that the modest agent will necessarily have to be deceptive. As Ridge points out, “A person may fail to emphasise some fact, say that he is a world-famous philosopher, without making *any* effort to get those around him to reject the proposition corresponding to that fact.”<sup>42</sup> All that might be required is that the agent not go out of their way to draw attention to their accomplishments (or positive attributes) in cases where doing so might have a negative impact on others. And this is not deceptive. Secondly, it is not clear that the disposition to deceive in cases where another’s well-being is at stake is an unappealing one. Perhaps I *should* be disposed to lie or mislead when confronted with a situation where telling the truth will be (unnecessarily) harmful. This simply amounts to being tactful, and we intuitively think that this can be a perfectly nice, and perhaps even admirable, trait to possess. So even if modesty on the proposed account could involve deceit, it is not clear that this makes modesty unappealing. And, thirdly, it seems that if we did demand that the modest agent not have an accurate view of their own worth, then this might actually make it harder to support the idea that modesty is a virtue. A trait which is incompatible with self-knowledge may be even less appealing than one which simply allows for (benevolent) deceit. In terms of allowing for the value of modesty to be explained, we would be better off supporting MK than to demand ignorance from the modest agent.

I have now demonstrated some of the ways in which the modesty-as-kindness account is able to respond to possible objections. Having established the plausibility of this account, MK can now be used to determine whether Driver was correct when claiming that the trait of modesty poses a significant challenge to certain theories of virtue, including the composite model.

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<sup>42</sup> Ridge (2000) p. 272

## 2.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMPOSITE MODEL

Julia Driver has claimed that the trait of modesty (as a prime example of a “virtue of ignorance”) poses a challenge to intellectualist accounts of the moral virtues, and this will include accounts which involve a necessary component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. This is because, according to Driver, modesty is a virtue that actually requires a *lack* of such skill – the genuinely modest agent must be such that they will consistently fail to correctly assess their own level of worth (or accomplishment or ability). Given that the composite model includes a component of necessary skill, we have good reason to ask whether or not Driver’s objection is correct. However, I have shown that Driver’s underestimation account of modesty should not be accepted, and I have proposed an alternative account. With this alternative account in mind, we can now consider whether the trait of modesty really does pose a challenge to the composite model of the moral virtues.

Consider again the modesty-as-kindness account. On this view, it is entirely possible for the modest agent to possess the same failures of cognitive skill that were mentioned by Driver. It can be the case that the agent is not capable of accurately assessing their own abilities or accomplishments (either through overestimating or underestimating them), they can fail to reliably pick up on evidence that ought to reveal to them the truth of such matters, and they can also lack the skills involved in accurately comparing themselves to other people. While these failings are not *required* by modesty-as-kindness, they are *consistent* with that account. And this looks to be equally bad news for the composite model. Moral virtue cannot necessarily involve a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how if it is possible to possess a virtue while lacking precisely such relevant skills. Therefore, while we ought not to accept Driver’s own account of the nature of modesty, Driver may yet be correct when claiming that modesty poses a significant challenge to accounts such as the composite model.

Of course, it will be possible for a defender of the composite model to simply deny that modesty is a moral virtue. But this response requires that some acceptable method be provided for identifying which traits are moral virtues, as well as demonstrating that the proposed method would rule out the trait of modesty. Furthermore, it is worth pointing



out that MK does provide us with reason to think that a successful method for identifying the moral virtues would affirm the virtue status of modesty. In addition to the widespread acceptance of modesty as a virtue, the modesty-as-kindness account has shown that we have good reason to consider the trait to be morally valuable. As was highlighted above, MK reveals that the trait of modesty is likely to be both socially beneficial and to be strongly connected with the commonly accepted moral virtue of kindness. On such a view, therefore, there is reason to expect that a successful method for identifying moral virtues will accept the virtue status of modesty. In the absence of a worked out method for identifying the moral virtues, these considerations are not conclusive. However, they do suggest that the defensive move of denying the virtue status of modesty can be expected to face serious challenges.

Another response to the challenge posed by modesty for the composite model would be to provide some further objection to the account of modesty that has been presented here. Even if a defender of the composite model accepts the virtue status of modesty, they may refuse to accept the modesty-as-kindness account. It may be claimed that the composite model will be perfectly able to accommodate the virtue of modesty once we have the correct account of modesty in hand. It is true that (as with any theory) the endorsement of MK will remain somewhat provisional until all possible objections have been considered. However, I have already demonstrated how a defender of modesty-as-kindness will be able to respond to some of the more pressing objections that are likely to be raised. The above discussion ought to tell us that MK is a strong contender in this debate. To that extent, there is reason to believe that the challenge raised here is a significant one.

In addition to the potential for future considerations to *weaken* the challenge posed to the composite model, it is also important to point out the potential for that challenge to be *strengthened*. The trait of modesty was only one of Driver's original examples of a virtue of ignorance. In addition to the prime example of modesty, Driver also suggests the traits of blind charity, impulsive courage, trust, and a form of forgiveness.<sup>43</sup> There is no reason to believe that this list is exhaustive. It is possible that an acceptable account

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<sup>43</sup> Driver (2001) Chapter 2

of any one of these additional traits will reveal that trait to be a genuine virtue of ignorance. I will not attempt to provide an account of these traits here, but it is important to note that future work on these candidate virtues may well provide us with further counter-examples to the composite model. If so, the challenge posed by the virtues of ignorance will be even more considerable.

To conclude this section, I have proposed and defended an account of the nature of modesty on which modesty is compatible with a lack of relevant cognitive skill(s) or know-how. If the widespread acceptance of the virtue status of modesty is correct then this would suggest that modesty provides us with a counter-example to the necessity of cognitive skill for moral virtue. We would then have reason to reject the composite model of the moral virtues. While future considerations may prompt us to reassess the strength of this challenge, it is at least as likely that the strength of the challenge will *increase* once we come to consider the nature of other suggested virtues of ignorance. Therefore, it would appear that we have good reason to consider alternatives to the composite model. Further support for this conclusion can be gained by briefly considering a second possible objection.

### **3. OBJECTION 2 – THE WORRY OF ELITISM**

The composite model posits that every moral virtue consists of two components. On this account, virtue will require an important element of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. The passages from Zagzebski quoted earlier in this chapter highlight that the virtuous agent is expected to be “reasonably successful in the skills or cognitive activities associated with the application of virtue”. They also provide some examples of the skills involved in specific candidate virtues, such as the skill of predicting the outcome of various alternative courses of action that is taken to be involved in the candidate virtue of compassion. These quotes suggest that the possession of a moral virtue will be intellectually demanding. And this idea gains further support when Zagzebski says that “the virtuous person has a superior form of moral knowledge. She is able to know the right thing to do in a way that cannot be predicted in advance”<sup>44</sup> and that “Being reasonably intelligent within a certain area of life is part of having almost any moral

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<sup>44</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 119

virtue.”<sup>45</sup> These quotes should lead us to suspect that the composite model, on which moral virtue requires the possession of relevant cognitive skill(s) or know-how, will be intellectually demanding.

Zagzebski is far from unique among contemporary virtue theorists in holding the view that the possession of specific moral virtues requires the possession of cognitive skills that are potentially intellectually demanding. Just as Zagzebski lists the skills required for justice and compassion, the following quotes from Julia Annas and Paul Bloomfield, respectively, make a similar point for the candidate moral virtues of generosity and courage:

Generosity requires intelligence about what people both need and want, and also about appropriate ways, times, and manners of giving, avoiding obtrusiveness and condescension.<sup>46</sup>

the full story about courage... will require both an ability to discern real from apparent danger and knowledge of what is of value in life. So, courage requires an ability to manage fear, a conative achievement, but it also requires an intellectual understanding of what is worth taking risks for.<sup>47</sup>

An understandable response to these quotes – and to the general claim that this type of skill is required for virtue – is to worry that many agents will be ruled out as even potential possessors of moral virtue. Certainly, children and non-human animals are unlikely to possess the skills that are involved. The same applies to those with cognitive disabilities or who are suffering from mental illness.<sup>48</sup> It is likely that people will differ on how intuitive they find the claim that such agents cannot be morally virtuous. However, the class of people who cannot be in possession of moral virtue on the composite model may be even wider than this. Indeed, *most* people seem likely to struggle to meet the high intellectual standards demanded by the relevant cognitive

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 149

<sup>46</sup> Annas (2011) p. 84

<sup>47</sup> Bloomfield (2013) p. 295

<sup>48</sup> This much is acknowledged by Annas, when admitting that, on her view, those with Down’s syndrome are not capable of possessing moral virtue. See footnote 21 on p. 32 of Annas (2011).

skills, including those who are otherwise regarded as being relatively intelligent.<sup>49</sup> Can any of us be confident that we are capable of properly understanding the “application of rights and duties”, of accurately predicting “the effects of various forms of compassion on persons with different personalities”, or of being able to work out “what is of value in life”? If moral virtue requires the possession of such skills then it seems clear that the vast majority of people do not possess moral virtues and, indeed, cannot. The possession of moral virtue would then only be realistically possible for an intellectual elite. And we may well worry that such a conclusion speaks badly of an account of moral virtue. As Driver argues:

Virtue must be accessible – to those who are not wise but kind... who are capable of showing the appropriate compassionate responses to human suffering; to those who, like most of us, possess some intellectual or moral flaw.<sup>50</sup>

The composite model tells us that the vast majority of people are not (and realistically cannot be) just, compassionate, generous, courageous, honest, or kind, and this should give us cause to reflect on the acceptability of the account. Of course, a quick response to this worry would be to simply accept the implication. Annas suggests such a move in response to Driver, saying “We are not all wise, certainly, but it can be doubted whether we are all kind, either.”<sup>51</sup> This response points out that it is not particularly surprising that kind people are as rare as are exceptionally wise people. That may be correct. However, what *would* be surprising, I propose, is if those people who are not kind *just are* those people who are not wise, and for the very reason that they are not wise. It is in leading to this surprising and unintuitive conclusion that the composite model of the moral virtues finds itself vulnerable to the charge of being problematically elitist.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> I do not mean to suggest that we ought to be more surprised that the relatively intelligent do not possess moral virtues, rather that it would be surprising if they were ruled out as possessors of virtue *because of* a lack of intellectual ability.

<sup>50</sup> Driver (2001) p. 54

<sup>51</sup> Annas (2011) p. 30

<sup>52</sup> Different ways in which the charge of elitism has been levelled at various forms of virtue *ethics* are discussed in Svensson (2008).

It is possible to respond to any charge of elitism by appealing to other examples where a similar form of discrimination takes place but where this is not considered problematic. In the case at hand, the distinction between those who can be in possession of a moral virtue and those who cannot is being made (partly) on the grounds of the possession of a suitable level of intellectually demanding cognitive skill. Therefore, a defender of the composite model can respond to the worry of elitism by pointing to other cases where a distinction on these grounds is made and where that distinction is clearly acceptable. Such examples, it turns out, are numerous. When deciding whether or not someone can be, for example, a recognised doctor or lawyer, we tend to require proof that they are in possession of certain cognitive skills. The same applies in less formal settings such as when we are deciding who is or is not a suitable babysitter for our children, or who is an appropriate source of advice on some pressing matter. And while no explicit test of intelligence must be passed in order to vote, the exclusion of children from the electorate suggests that we do think that certain cognitive skills are required in order to properly fulfil the role of voter.<sup>53</sup> What these examples suggest is that it is sometimes considered acceptable to deny people a certain role or status on the grounds of a lack of relevant skill or know-how. Why, then, should the composite model be regarded as problematically elitist for implying that such skills are required in order to be a possessor of moral virtue? What is important here is the availability of a proper justification for excluding agents from possessing a particular status on the grounds of a lack of skill. In cases where such a justification is available, the resulting approach should not be considered problematically elitist. This appears to be the case in the examples given involving doctors or lawyers, where an alternative system that failed to make the same distinction would be clearly undesirable. However, it is not yet clear whether a similar justification exists to vindicate the composite model. Until this has been shown it will also not be clear whether or not the composite model ought to be considered problematically elitist.

The composite model of the moral virtues requires the possession of certain intellectually demanding cognitive skills, and this has the result that many people are excluded from being even potential possessors of moral virtue. This class of people will

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<sup>53</sup> An argument that there *should* be a test of intellectual competence before citizens are allowed to vote is provided in Brennan (2011).

certainly include children and those with cognitive disabilities or mental illnesses, but it is also likely to include many more people given the demanding levels of skill posited in the quotes above. Such exclusion should not be considered problematically elitist if it can be justified. That is, it should not be considered problematically elitist if an alternative account which fails to make the same distinction would be thereby inferior. Therefore, before we can know how seriously to take the worry of elitism, it will be necessary to consider the acceptability of an account of virtue that omits the requirement of a skills component. If such an account is found to be unacceptable then this will strengthen the prospects of the composite model by showing that it can be defended from the charge of elitism. However, if a model of moral virtue that avoids mention of a specific skills component can be defended, this would, at the same time, increase the challenge posed by the problem of elitism. We therefore have good reason to consider an alternative account of the moral virtues, both as a way of determining the force of the present challenge to the composite model and out of an interest in the independent merits of such an alternative.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter has been to put pressure on the composite model of the moral virtues. Both of the objections considered in this chapter have challenged the necessity of the component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how posited by that model. The objection from the virtues of ignorance shows that counter-examples – such as the trait of modesty – can be used to deny that necessity, while the objection from elitism suggests that requiring such a component may be problematic in itself. Given these objections, we now have good reason to consider an alternative to the composite model. In particular, there is good reason to consider an account that does not include a necessary skills component. The motivations model of the moral virtues is just such an account.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE MOTIVATIONS MODEL OF THE MORAL VIRTUES**

### **0. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter focused on the composite model of the moral virtues and argued that worries regarding the virtues of ignorance and the charge of elitism provide us with good reason to consider an alternative account. In particular, we have good reason to consider an account of the moral virtues which does not demand that virtuous agents possess a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. The motivations model provides us with an example of such an account. In this chapter I have three main aims. Firstly, I want to spend some time clarifying the commitments of the motivations model and setting out the version of the model that I will be defending. Secondly, in the largest section of this chapter, I will evaluate major objections that can be (and have been) directed against the motivations model and, indeed, against any model that fails to include a necessary component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how.<sup>1</sup> By responding to these objections I will provide support for the claim that the motivations model is a sufficient account of the nature of the moral virtues. The chapter will then end with a consideration of some positive implications of endorsing the motivations model. By the end of this chapter it ought to be clear that the motivations model is a legitimate contender within this debate, and a live option for those working in virtue theory.

### **1. PRELIMINARIES—CLARIFYING THE MOTIVATIONS MODEL**

The motivations model of the moral virtues states that a moral virtue consists of a motivation of a particular sort. Of course, it will be possible for theorists to agree with this basic claim (and so to endorse the motivations model) and yet to disagree over the best understanding of that claim. Different versions of the motivations model will be generated by focusing on different accounts of the type of motivation that is relevant for moral virtues. For that reason, it is important to be clear on the type of motivation

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<sup>1</sup> I will sometimes talk as if demonstrating the insufficiency of the motivations model would be an obvious benefit for supporters of the rival composite model. This is true in the narrow sense that it would make the composite model the most promising of the three models discussed in this work. It would also be true in a wider sense if the best way to resolve any demonstrated insufficiency in the motivations model was to add a component of relevant skill(s) or know-how. However, there is logical space for the view that (i) the motivations model is insufficient and (ii) the best way to resolve this is some way other than by adding a component of relevant skill. If the objections considered here turn out to be successful then this may provide just as much support for this latter kind of view as it does for the composite model.

that I have in mind in this chapter. In the previous chapter, I suggested that Linda Zagzebski's account of the virtues (when interpreted in a particular way) offers a prime example of the composite model – the virtues are taken to consist of a motivational component plus a component of those skills or abilities generally involved in being successful in attaining the end of the motivational component. In this chapter, I want to adopt Zagzebski's understanding of the motivational component in order to explain the type of motivation that is relevant for moral virtues. In this way, the version of the motivations model considered in this chapter will differ from the prime example of the composite model considered in the previous chapter solely in virtue of the lack of a skills component. It is important to now say more about Zagzebski's account of motivation.

According to Zagzebski, a motivation is “a persistent tendency to be moved by a motive of a certain kind”.<sup>2</sup> And a motive “is an emotion or feeling that initiates and directs action towards an end”.<sup>3</sup> Motivations in general, therefore, can be understood as tendencies or dispositions to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards some end. On the plausible assumption that not all motivations will be candidate moral virtues, it seems likely that only motivations *of a particular sort* ought to be considered here. There are two issues that I want to address at this stage. The first is how we ought to understand the *end* (or ends) towards which the relevant motivations are directed. The second is how best to understand the *type* of motivation that can plausibly count as a candidate moral virtue.

The motivations that we are interested in here are tendencies or dispositions (of a particular type) to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards some end. How should we characterise the end of motivations that are relevant to moral virtue? One option here will be to adopt an Aristotelian approach. According to Aristotle, in Book II of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions “for their own sakes”.<sup>4</sup> One possible interpretation of this suggestion is that the virtuous agent is choosing acts *as* virtuous, or because they would be virtuous to perform. On this

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<sup>2</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 132

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 34 [Book II, Chapter 4]



reading, the ultimate end of a virtuous motivation will be to act or to live virtuously. Such claims are endorsed by Julia Annas, who explains the point in the following way:

what is the virtuous person's aim in acting? She has two. One is her *telos* or overall aim, of living virtuously and acting from motives of virtue. Virtue, after all, is a settled state of the person, with the overall aim of making the person's life as a whole be one way rather than another, virtuous rather than evil or complacent... The virtuous person's other aim is what the Stoics call her *skopos* or immediate target, which is what is aimed at in any particular case of acting virtuously.<sup>5</sup>

The virtuous person will have immediate ends of course – saving this person from a burning building or helping this friend to study for an exam – but the ultimate end of a virtuous motivation is to live virtuously. This is one option for how to understand the end of motivations that are plausibly moral virtues, and it offers an interpretation of the Aristotelian claim that the virtuously motivated agent chooses virtue for its own sake.

However, we ought not to accept the claim that the ultimate end of (all) virtuous motivations is to live virtuously. This can be shown by considering examples of agents who plausibly possess virtuous motivations but who cannot be understood as aiming towards virtue when they act. One such example is provided by Nomy Arpaly in her discussion of Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry Finn, in the novel by Mark Twain, helps his friend Jim to escape from slavery by failing to report Jim to the authorities.<sup>6</sup> However, Finn has internalised the racist assumptions of his society and so believes that what he is doing is wrong. When helping Jim, Finn takes himself to be failing to do the right thing. As Arpaly reports, “He accuses himself of being a weak-willed boy, who has not ‘the spunk of a rabbit’ and cannot bring himself to do the right thing”.<sup>7</sup> If the end of virtuous motivations is to act or live virtuously, then it is clear that Finn's motivation when helping Jim is not a virtuous one. Finn explicitly decides to abandon what (he thinks) is right and “to remain a bad boy” out of a preference for helping his friend.<sup>8</sup> And yet, as Arpaly points out, Finn's motivation – to help his friend or to respect his

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<sup>5</sup> Annas (2003) p. 24

<sup>6</sup> This case was first introduced in the philosophy literature by Jonathan Bennett (1974).

<sup>7</sup> Arpaly (2002) pp. 75–76

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

friend's personhood – plausibly *is* morally worthy, and perhaps even virtuous. The same point is made by Julia Driver who uses the Huckleberry Finn case in order to show that the virtues do not necessarily involve “good intentions”, understood as desiring to act in a way that one takes to be good.<sup>9</sup> If we accept that it is possible for agents, such as Huckleberry Finn, to possess morally virtuous motivations without being motivated to act or to live virtuously then we ought to reject the suggestion that “living virtuously” is the unique end of those motivations which are moral virtues.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, an opponent might reply that we have failed to understand the suggestion charitably. The claim is not that virtuous agents have the end of living virtuously in the *de dicto* sense. Instead, the claim might simply be that the ends of moral virtues are such that if they are pursued successfully, then the agent will in fact be living in a way that is virtuous. If this is the suggestion then there seems to be little reason to deny it. However, it will not be helpful for our current purposes. It is not informative as to what the ends of moral motivations actually are, only that pursuing and attaining the ends of virtuous motivations will result in living virtuously. We ought to consider other possibilities.

Bernard Williams considers several additional ways of interpreting the Aristotelian claim that the virtuous agent chooses virtue for its own sake.<sup>11</sup> One possibility, which appears to gain direct support from *The Nicomachean Ethics*, is that the virtuous agent is motivated towards “the noble” (*to kalon*). Aristotle tells us that “virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble”.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, this suggestion faces the same problems as the previous one. For example, if understood in the *de dicto* sense it is incompatible with the idea that Huckleberry Finn’s motivation to help his friend was a morally virtuous one. And a further objection also applies to both the idea that virtuous motivations aim at “the noble” and that they aim at “living virtuously”. Williams points out that it is plausible that different moral virtues will have different ends. If we want to be able to differentiate the moral virtues by appeal to their different ends then we ought

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<sup>9</sup> Driver (2001) pp. 50–55 (See also Driver (1996) Section 3.)

<sup>10</sup> This view has also been recently criticised by Robert Adams in Adams (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Williams (1995) pp. 13–23

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 80 [1120<sup>a</sup>23]

not to claim that all virtues have the same end, be that the end of living virtuously or the end of nobility.<sup>13</sup> Instead, we ought to consider the idea that different moral virtues will have different characteristic ends.

One suggestion that is in-keeping with both the idea that different virtues have different ends and the idea that virtues are chosen “for their own sakes” is that the end of each virtue is to be virtuous in a particular way. That is, the end of the kind agent might be “to be kind”, the end of the courageous agent might be “to be courageous”, and so on for all of the candidate moral virtues. However, this suggestion is also false when read in the *de dicto* sense. As Williams points out, “courageous people rarely choose acts as courageous, and modest people never choose modest behaviour as modest.”<sup>14</sup> Instead, we ought to accept that each virtue will direct an agent towards a different end (or a different set of ends) where these different ends have a content that does not necessarily refer to the virtue term itself.<sup>15</sup> For example, the kind agent might be motivated to “help their friend” or to “tend to a sick relative”, while the ends that motivate the just agent or the honest agent may be different.<sup>16</sup> Williams actually takes this to be the best way of interpreting Aristotle’s original claim and, when responding to Williams, Rosalind Hursthouse is in broad agreement.<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to be clear that this is not my concern here. Regardless of whether or not it is an appropriate reading of Aristotle, the claim that different moral virtues will be directed towards different characteristic ends (or a range of different ends) looks to be a plausible one.

Motivations are being understood here as tendencies or dispositions (of a particular type) to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards some end. On reflection, it appears likely that different moral motivations will be directed towards different characteristic ends. It will be worthwhile to consider some specific examples of plausible moral virtues in order to better demonstrate this approach. One plausible example is that the virtue of kindness (on the motivations model) will consist of a tendency or

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<sup>13</sup> Williams (1995) p. 16

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 17–18

<sup>16</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, when accepting Williams’ general approach, suggests possible ends for those virtues that are discussed by Aristotle. See Hursthouse (1995) p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (See also Hursthouse (1999) Chapter 6.)

disposition (of a particular type) to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards the characteristic end of protecting and promoting the well-being of others. Perhaps the virtue of compassion will consist of a tendency or disposition (of a particular type) to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards the characteristic end of alleviating suffering. And the virtue of justice might be understood as consisting in a tendency or disposition (of a particular type) to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards the characteristic end of ensuring fair outcomes. Having said something about the ends of plausibly moral motivations, I now want to say something about the type of motivation that we need to consider.

In the above explanation I frequently referred to tendencies or dispositions “of a particular type”. In order for it to be plausible for motivations to count as moral virtues, the motivations that we consider will need to have certain features. Take the example of the virtue of kindness when understood as a motivation to protect and promote well-being. We do not think of the virtuously kind agent as one whose motivation can be sporadic or fleeting. Instead, the motivations that we are interested in must be sufficiently *persistent*. Furthermore, any virtuous motivation must be sufficiently *strongly felt*. That is, the motivation must not be so weak that, even if persistent, it would never be strong enough to actually prompt the agent into action. A persistent but weakly felt motivation to protect and promote well-being will not be sufficient for virtuous kindness. And thirdly, a virtuous motivation must be sufficiently *robust* in the sense that it will not be easily overridden by competing considerations. If an agent possesses a persistent and strongly felt motivation to protect and promote well-being, but their motivation is always overridden by the competing aim of making as much money as possible, then we will not want to say that their motivation for well-being is sufficient for virtue. It is only when sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness are achieved that we can say that an agent possesses the type of motivation necessary for a moral virtue. And we can call a motivation that meets the sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness a *deep* motivation.

It is now possible to set out the main claim of the version of the motivations model that I will be defending in this chapter. Possession of a moral virtue consists of possession

of a deep motivation, where this is understood as possession of a deep disposition to be moved (through feeling or emotion) towards some characteristic end. At this stage it would be possible to focus on two further clarifications. The first would be to settle what counts as the sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness for a deep motivation. The second would be to identify which motivations of this type ought to actually be accepted as moral virtues. I will not attempt to resolve these issues here.<sup>18</sup> Instead, when necessary I will aim to appeal only to examples likely to be accepted as clearly satisfying or not satisfying plausible levels of sufficiency. Similarly, for the time being I will aim to use as examples only those candidate moral virtues that would be widely accepted by other contemporary virtue theorists. Having made this clear, we can now ask whether or not the motivations model provides us with an acceptable account. This will primarily involve asking whether or not the possession of a deep motivation can be regarded as sufficient for the possession of a moral virtue.

## **2. OBJECTIONS TO THE MOTIVATIONS MODEL**

I will now set out three objections and explain how a supporter of the motivations model ought to respond. The objections to be considered are: (i) the claim that the motivations model cannot account for the fact that virtuous agents ought to be reliably successful when acting; (ii) the claim that the motivations model is unable to accommodate an appealing distinction between “actual virtues” and “natural virtues”; and (iii) the claim that supporting the motivations model amounts to a celebration of irrationality.<sup>19</sup> While these objections are related, it will be important to deal with them separately in order to ensure clarity regarding the responses that are required by each. By responding to these objections, I aim to demonstrate that the motivations model is a legitimate contender and a live option for those working in virtue theory.

### **2.1 VIRTUE AND RELIABLE SUCCESS**

When looking to defend the claim that the motivations model provides a sufficient account of the nature of the moral virtues, it is important to examine considerations that

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<sup>18</sup> Discussion of which traits ought to be accepted as moral virtues will be the focus of Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

<sup>19</sup> A possible fourth objection will be considered separately in Chapter Four.

suggest the need for an additional component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. One such consideration is the widely accepted idea that genuinely virtuous agents will be reliably successful when pursuing the ends of their virtuous motivations. Indeed, this idea has been taken to provide the most pressing challenge to accounts such as the motivations model, because it suggests that good intentions may not be sufficient for genuine virtue. That this idea is widely accepted can be shown by considering just a handful of quotes from influential contemporary virtue theorists. Philippa Foot states that “failures in performance rather than intention may show a lack of virtue.”<sup>20</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse explains that “Each of the virtues involves getting things right... In the case of generosity this involves giving the right amount of the right sort of thing, for the right reasons, to the right people, on the right occasions.”<sup>21</sup> And Joel Kupperman points out that calling an agent virtuous implies that “she or he tends to perform very well on occasions of a certain sort”.<sup>22</sup> Zagzebski expresses the general idea well when saying:

It is clear that virtuous persons acting out of virtue have certain aims, and we generally think that it is not sufficient to merely *have* the aims in order to be virtuous, but that a virtuous person reliably produces the ends of the virtue in question. So compassionate persons are reliably successful in alleviating suffering; fair persons are reliably successful in producing fair states of affairs; generous persons are reliably successful in giving to those who are in need, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

The assumption that a virtuous agent will be reliably successful in achieving their virtuous ends casts doubt on the sufficiency of the motivations model. It seems possible for an agent to have a disposition to be moved towards some virtuous end and yet to be utterly unreliable in actually achieving that end. Consider the agent who really is moved towards the protection and promotion of well-being but who never actually succeeds in protecting or promoting well-being. This might be possible in several different ways, and it will be important to discuss these different possibilities in some detail. For now it will suffice to get clear on the basic challenge that is being made: genuine moral virtue

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<sup>20</sup> Foot (2002) p. 4

<sup>21</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 12

<sup>22</sup> Kupperman (1991) p. 9

<sup>23</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 99

requires an agent to be reliably successful in achieving virtuous ends, and we have reason to doubt that the motivations model will be able to explain this fact. If it cannot then this will suggest that something else is required in order to truly possess a moral virtue and that, therefore, the motivations model is not sufficient. We can call this the *objection from reliable success*.

To make matters worse, the considerations highlighted by the objection from reliable success also provide direct support for the two rival models that have been considered so far. Both the skills model and the composite model require that a virtuous agent possess a set of cognitive skills relevant to the moral virtue in question. And, of course, the possession of these skills seems more likely to ensure that the virtuous agent will be reliably successful in pursuing virtuous ends. For example, if the virtue of compassion necessarily involves possessing the skills of identifying whenever someone is in need, as well as working out how best to alleviate that need, then we will have little trouble in explaining why the virtuously compassionate agent reliably succeeds in alleviating suffering. By failing to include a necessary component of relevant skills, the motivations model appears to find itself at a disadvantage. Considerations regarding the reliability of virtuous agents provide support for rival accounts, and cast doubt on the motivations model.

My response to this objection will be in two parts. I want to first make some general comments in order to defend the motivations model against the claim that it cannot appropriately accommodate reliable success. I will then discuss different specific ways in which possessors of a deep motivation might fail to be reliably successful, and explain how the motivations model ought to respond in each case.

The first move that ought to be made in response to this objection is to highlight the fact that no account of the moral virtues ought to demand *perfectly* reliable success from virtuous agents. Evidence for this comes from the fact that even Julia Driver's consequentialist account of the moral virtues – on which virtue is explicitly tied to the attainment of positive outcomes – demands only that positive outcomes be achieved

“generally speaking”.<sup>24</sup> Even for Driver, virtues “don’t infallibly lead to the good. There is room for accident in this account, which makes the account more plausible.”<sup>25</sup> But why would demanding perfectly reliable success make an account of the moral virtues implausible? A first reason is that virtue possession ought to at least be possible for human beings. If virtue possession ceases to be a sensible and worthwhile goal for human beings to strive towards, then much of the reason for being interested in the virtues will have been lost. This looks to be a serious risk if we demand perfectly reliable success from our virtuous agents. Suppose we claimed that a virtuously kind agent should be perfectly reliable in the sense that they would never perform an action that fails to protect and promote well-being. This seems likely to lead to the result that no real agents actually possess virtuous kindness, despite there being people who intuitively *should* class as being kind. Imagine the following case:

*Hitchhiker.* Angela is driving along an otherwise deserted rural road and spots a lonely hitchhiker. Out of a strong motivation to help, Angela offers the hitchhiker a lift. After a journey filled with pleasant conversation, Angela and the hitchhiker arrive at their destination, where the hitchhiker is just in time to brutally murder an old acquaintance.

In this example, Angela has performed an action that has failed to protect and promote well-being. Had she not offered a lift to the hitchhiker, the hitchhiker would not have arrived in time to murder the acquaintance. And yet, despite the seriousness of the harm, this does not seem to be enough to rule Angela out as a possessor of genuinely virtuous kindness. It is important to note here that such an example will be possible even if we imagine that Angela possesses a significant number of relevant skills, and to a high degree. We can imagine an especially charming hitchhiker with a plausible alternative story of their immediate intentions, and perhaps even with convincingly crafted character references on hand if required. It will always be possible that a genuinely kind agent could be fooled and so perform an action that fails to protect or

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<sup>24</sup> Driver (2001) p. 60 (Driver’s account of the virtues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 61



promote well-being.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in order to make this impossible, the level of skill or know-how that we demand would need to be exceptionally high – perhaps even to the level that is sometimes ascribed to an “ideal observer”.<sup>27</sup> If we say that the possession of a moral virtue requires omniscience (knowledge of all non-moral facts) and omnipercipience (the ability to perceive the outcomes of all possible actions) then we really will have ensured that virtuous agents are perfectly reliable. But we will also have ensured that no human being can be a virtuous agent. Assuming that we take this to be an unappealing conclusion, it is clear that we ought not to demand perfectly reliable success in order to count as being genuinely morally virtuous.<sup>28</sup>

A second (related) reason why demanding perfectly reliable success would be implausible is that it makes virtue possession a hostage of moral luck to a problematic extent. An agent might fail to protect well-being as a result of a series of unpredictable and unfortunate events, and this ought not to rule them out as being genuinely kind. Similarly, an agent’s best efforts might be non-culpably thwarted by a widespread conspiracy or an evil demon, as in a case provided by Jason Baehr:

*Demon:* Upon returning from a recent, eye-opening trip to an impoverished third-world country, Ted has resigned as the CEO of a lucrative but soulless corporation to start a nonprofit organization aimed at improving the plight of various poor and oppressed people groups across the globe... The demon, while not concealing the general nature of reality from Ted, nevertheless thwarts all of his moral efforts. Though Ted thinks that his fundraising is resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars of aid being sent around the world, the demon systematically stymies the transactions, funneling the cash into slush funds at Ted’s former corporation.<sup>29</sup>

Cases of moral luck, such as *Demon*, highlight the fact that an agent can qualify as being genuinely kind despite it being the case that unfortunate circumstances prevent them

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<sup>26</sup> For a similar case of a genuinely virtuous agent failing to successfully achieve their (immediate) goals, see Annas (2003) pp. 24–25.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, the attributes assigned to the ideal observer by Roderick Firth in ‘Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer’ (as printed 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Christian Miller is one example of a virtue theorist who argues that the virtues (and vices) aren’t widely possessed, but even Miller does not go so far as to say that *no one* does or could possess the virtues. See Miller (2013) and Miller (2014).

<sup>29</sup> Baehr (2007) p. 460

from being perfectly reliable in protecting or promoting well-being. Even those who accept a general connection between moral virtue and reliable success can be expected to agree with this conclusion. We should not demand that the motivations model (or any other model) ensure perfect reliability in achieving virtuous ends.

The first move in the general response to the objection from reliable success is to point out that no account should be expected to ensure perfect reliability from virtuous agents. The second move is to explain that the motivations model is perfectly able to accommodate the idea that virtuous agents can be expected to be more reliable in attaining the ends of their virtuous motivations. Interestingly, the beginnings of this response can be found in the work of theorists who would reject the motivations model. For example, Driver points out that “good intentions, good inclinations, and so on are conducive to good action. They are reliable directors of good action.”<sup>30</sup> This idea is also supported in the following quote from Zagzebski:

A virtuous motivation makes the agent want to act effectively, and this has both general and particular consequences. The former include the desire to gain knowledge appropriate to the area of life that is the focus of the virtue and to develop the skills associated with virtuous effectiveness in that area of life. Particular consequences include the desire to find out the relevant nonmoral facts about the particular circumstances encountered by the agent in which action on the virtuous motivation may be called for.<sup>31</sup>

Consider again the motivation that I have suggested will be involved in the moral virtue of kindness: the deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. The motivations model may be rejected as insufficient if possessors of this motivation cannot generally be expected to be reliable in actually protecting and promoting well-being. However, the quote from Zagzebski highlights some of the likely consequences of possessing a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. The agent will be driven to work out what well-being actually consists in, as well as the means that are usually effective in protecting and promoting it. They will be driven to develop the relevant skills and know-

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<sup>30</sup> Driver (2001) p. 61

<sup>31</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 133

how that will enable them to act effectively and, in any given situation, they will endeavour to uncover facts that may be relevant to well-being. They will also take as much care as possible to avoid unnecessary harm to others.<sup>32</sup> As a result, agents with this motivation will, in general, be more likely to be successful in the protection and promotion of well-being. The motivations model can therefore accept that there is a connection between virtue and reliable success – not because the virtues partly consist in some set of relevant skills, but because virtue *drives* the agent to develop those skills. A defender of the motivations model can therefore agree with the intuition that, in general, being virtuous tends to involve being reliably successful in achieving virtuous aims.

I said above that my response to the objection from reliable success would have two parts. The first involved making some general comments in order to demonstrate that the motivations model is able to explain why virtuous agents, in general, can be expected to be more reliable in achieving their virtuous ends, and why perfect reliability ought not to be demanded by any account. The second part involves discussing particular ways in which an agent with a deep motivation might nevertheless fail to be reliably successful, and explaining how the motivations model ought to respond to such cases. I will now move on to this second part.

The following examples highlight three different ways in which an agent might consistently fail to achieve the ends of a virtuous motivation:

*Case 1:* George takes himself to be motivated to promote well-being. Unfortunately, George has seriously incorrect views about what well-being consists in, with the result that his actions typically fail to benefit anyone.

*Case 2:* Nick takes himself to be motivated to promote well-being, and has a good understanding of what well-being consists in. Unfortunately, Nick is misguided regarding the best means of carrying out his intentions, with the result that his actions typically fail to benefit anyone.

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<sup>32</sup> The same point is made by Michael Slote. Slote (2001, p.18) points out that possessing benevolence means that “one cares about who exactly is needy and to what extent they are needy, and such care, in turn, essentially involves wanting and making efforts to know relevant facts, so that one’s benevolence can really be useful.”

*Case 3:* Claude takes himself to be motivated to promote well-being, and he has correct views about what well-being consists in and how best to promote it. However, Claude's bumbling and clumsy nature ensures that he rarely succeeds in actually benefiting anyone.

When first asked to come up with examples of morally virtuous agents, it is perhaps unlikely that most people would think of cases such as George, Nick and Claude. For that reason, it is important to ask whether or not the motivations model is forced to accept that these agents truly are virtuously kind, and whether or not that judgement is acceptable. And the first thing to say is that the motivations model can certainly allow that we would be justified in being suspicious in each of these cases. It may be that the true cause of each agent's failing is a lack of depth in their motivation. For example, if Nick has good reason to suppose that his chosen methods will not be successful, and if there are competing motivations that point him in the direction of the methods that he ultimately chooses, then we will have good reason to suppose that his motivation to promote well-being is insufficiently persistent, strong or robust. And a similar failing in motivation might be the cause of Claude's failure to overcome his clumsiness or George's failure to realise that he is seriously mistaken about the nature of well-being. Of course, each agent might genuinely *believe* that they are deeply motivated to promote well-being. However, if their respective failings are actually explained by a failure in the persistence, strength or robustness of their motivation to promote well-being, then the motivations model will not have to accept that these agents possess virtuous kindness.

With this in mind, let us now stipulate that the agents in these three cases really do possess a deep motivation. Will the motivations model now have to say that these agents (who all consistently fail to be successful) possess a genuine moral virtue, and will that be an intuitively acceptable judgement? Consider first the case of Claude. We are now imagining that Claude has a legitimately deep motivation to promote well-being, but that he continues to be thwarted by his own clumsy nature. Given that Claude's deep motivation will have prompted him to try to overcome this aspect of his nature, we must assume that there is some serious obstacle to his becoming more adroit. Perhaps this will be something like a physical defect that prevents Claude from moving quickly enough, or a mental defect that prevents him from processing information quickly enough. In

such a case, it does not seem at all implausible that Claude should be judged as a possessor of genuine *moral* virtue, even if we would not consider him to be either physically or intellectually ideal. Indeed, Claude appears to be a victim of luck to the same extent as Ted in the case of *Demon*. Just as Ted was faced with unsurmountable bad luck which impacted upon the external consequences of his actions, Claude is faced with bad luck in the sense that he has some internal obstacle that he cannot overcome. And just as Ted's bad luck should not be taken to rule him out as a possessor of moral virtue, neither should Claude's. It should not be considered problematic that the motivations model accepts the possibility of virtue possession in examples like *Case 3*.

Consider next the case of Nick. We are now imagining that Nick has a genuinely deep motivation to promote well-being, but is consistently mistaken regarding the best means of attaining that end. One possibility here is that Nick faces a similar problem to Claude. Perhaps Nick suffers from some internal obstacle in the sense that he lacks the intellectual abilities required to work out the best means of attaining his end. Another possibility is that Nick simply does not have access to the reasons that tell against his own chosen method. This might be true in cases where the required evidence in support of those reasons is not generally available (such as when those reasons are not yet recognised in an agent's society or when the evidence is concealed by an evil demon).<sup>33</sup> In either case, if Nick's mistakes stem solely from his inability to work out how best to achieve his virtuous ends, then we ought to accept him as a possessor of genuine kindness. To borrow a quote from David Hume:

these errors are so far from being the source of all immorality, that they are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fail into them. They extend not beyond a mistake of *fact*, which moralists have not generally supposed criminal, as being perfectly involuntary. I am more to be lamented than blamed, if I am mistaken with regard to the influence of objects in producing pain or pleasure, or if I know not the proper means of satisfying my desires. No one can ever regard such errors as a defect in my moral character.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Miranda Fricker's recent discussion of Herbert Greenleaf is an interesting and relevant example of a case where important moral reasons are not generally available in a society. See Fricker (2007), especially pp. 100–108.

<sup>34</sup> Hume (as printed 2011) p. 401 [Book 3, Part 1, Section 1]

However we interpret Hume's actual intentions in this passage, one important point that can be taken from it is the following: when an agent fails, despite their best efforts, to work out how best to proceed or how best to achieve some goal, this failing should not necessarily be taken to reveal a defect in their *moral* character. And if we think that an agent's moral character is determined by their possession of moral virtues (and vices), then these failings also ought not to tell against their possession of moral virtues.<sup>35</sup> Once we have stipulated that Nick truly does possess a deep motivation towards the promotion of well-being, his inability to work out how best to achieve this ought not to count as a moral deficiency (even if it might count as an intellectual failing).<sup>36</sup> It should not be considered problematic if the motivations model accepts the possibility of virtue possession in examples like *Case 2*.

What, then, can we say about our final example, the case of George? Unlike the cases of Claude and Nick, it is less obvious that the motivations model ought to judge George as a possessor of virtuous kindness. Even if we accept that George possesses a deep motivation, it is less clear that what he is motivated towards actually is well-being. If an agent is motivated towards something that is very different from what well-being actually consists of (whatever that may be) then there may come a point where we ought to judge that they are not really motivated towards well-being. In extreme cases this will be obvious. If an agent takes "well-being" to mean what we would usually mean by the term "happiness" then they are simply too misguided to count as having well-being as the end of their deep motivation. And the same will be true if by "well-being" they mean "crippling agony". In less extreme cases it will be correspondingly less clear, and it may often be difficult to determine whether or not an agent's deep motivation truly is sufficiently directed towards the end of well-being. This means that it will often be difficult to determine who does and who does not possess genuinely virtuous kindness. It is important to point out that this ought not to be considered a failing of an account of the moral virtues. Indeed, we ought to be suspicious of any account that guarantees to

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<sup>35</sup> We might think that there are morally relevant traits that are neither virtues nor vices, such as Miller's "Mixed Traits". I do not mean to rule out this possibility here. For more on Mixed Traits see Miller (2014).

<sup>36</sup> There will be reason to return to this point when discussing implications of the motivations model later in this chapter.

make it easy for us to correctly identify virtuous or vicious agents in the real world. Examples like the case of George simply highlight one way in which a difficulty can arise. In order to get clearer on the case, we would need to seek more information about what exactly George is targeting, and how closely that end matches an accurate conception of well-being (whatever that may be). Methods for attaining this additional information may include observing George in various situations and noting what features of a situation reliably lead him to act, and in what ways. This much has been suggested by Michael Slote when discussing cases where we are unsure whether an agent is truly motivated by benevolence, or by conscientiousness.<sup>37</sup> What is important, however, is to recognise that there may be cases where it remains difficult to determine whether or not an agent possesses a moral virtue. It speaks well of the motivations model that it encourages us to be sensitive to this possibility in response to cases such as *Case 1*.

My response to the objection from reliable success has had two parts. The first has been to point out that the motivations model can perfectly well explain why virtuous agents can, in general, be expected to be more reliable in achieving their virtuous ends, and that, on any account, we should not be demanding perfect reliability. The second has been to consider specific cases where an agent with a deep motivation might consistently fail to achieve their virtuous ends, and to explain what the motivations model can say about such cases. Given the plausibility of this response, we ought to accept that the objection from reliable success fails to rule out the motivations model as a live option in this debate.

## 2.2 ACTUAL VIRTUE AND NATURAL VIRTUE

A second serious challenge to the acceptability of the motivations model is the claim that this model is unable to accommodate what is an intuitively appealing distinction within virtue theory. This is the distinction between “actual virtues” and “natural virtues”. In this section I will explain how the distinction is typically understood and why it looks to be a problem for the motivations model. Having first considered why we might want to maintain a distinction of this type, I will then propose an alternative understanding of

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<sup>37</sup> Slote (2001) Chapter 2 (Slote also discusses how we ought to judge those with a “perverse” understanding of well-being in Chapter 1, p. 28.)

the distinction between actual and natural virtues which is compatible with the motivations model.

The distinction between natural virtues and actual virtues (or virtues “in the strict sense”) goes back at least as far as Aristotle. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that natural virtues are those that someone might have “from the very moment of birth” while “we seek something else as that which is good in the strict sense”.<sup>38</sup> The idea that emerges is of natural virtues as something simple – such as the basic friendly feeling that children might demonstrate when sharing their toys – while the actual virtues require something more refined. Aristotle elaborates on this point by explaining that the actual virtues are those which are complimented by the possession of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). He tells us that:

as in the part of us that forms opinions there are two types, cleverness and practical wisdom, so too in the moral part there are two types, natural virtue and virtue in the strict sense, and of these the latter involves practical wisdom... It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom.<sup>39</sup>

In this passage, Aristotle distinguishes actual virtues and natural virtues by pointing out that possessors of natural virtue lack practical wisdom, while the actual virtues *require* practical wisdom. Contemporary virtue theorists also accept that actual and natural virtues differ as a result of the association between actual virtue and practical wisdom. For example, Daniel Russell explains that “phronesis is a part of every virtue in the strict sense (as opposed to, say, Aristotle’s so-called ‘natural’ virtues).”<sup>40</sup> And Julia Annas also accepts this point, such as when asking whether or not virtues can be possessed independently of each other and saying that “This is possible with the natural virtues, but not the proper or real virtues. For to have even one of these you need practical intelligence, but when you have this you have all of the virtues.”<sup>41</sup> If we agree with these theorists and accept that actual and natural virtues can be distinguished by appeal to the

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<sup>38</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) pp. 156–158 [Book VI, Chapter 13]

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Russell (2009) p. 335

<sup>41</sup> Annas (2011) p. 86



notion of practical wisdom, then this will be problematic for the motivations model of the moral virtues.<sup>42</sup> The motivations model does not include a requirement for practical wisdom in its account of (actual) moral virtues and so will be unable to distinguish actual and natural virtues in this way. If the distinction is deemed to be appealing, then this may count as a significant failing on the part of the motivations model.

The motivations model does not include practical wisdom as a requirement for virtue, and this means that it is unable to distinguish actual and natural virtues with reference to practical wisdom. To make matters worse, it looks as if the rival composite model is able to accommodate the distinction in the standard Aristotelian way. We saw in the previous chapter that many theorists accept the idea that practical wisdom can be understood as a suite or collection of practical cognitive skills and abilities, such as “comprehension”, “sense”, and “*nous*”. Indeed, Russell claims that “there is now general consensus that right reason is a reasoning capacity that a *phronimos* has, rather than a set of principles that a *phronimos* knows... This view is further supported by Aristotle’s treating *phronesis* and right reason as interchangeable.”<sup>43</sup> Russell then lists Sarah Broadie, Rosalind Hursthouse, and J. O. Urmson as noted Aristotelian scholars who now accept this view.<sup>44</sup> If it is right that practical wisdom can be understood in terms of the possession of certain cognitive skills or abilities, then the composite model will be able to accommodate the distinction between actual and natural virtues in the standard way. Natural virtues can be understood as positive motivations lacking the required practical wisdom, while actual virtues will involve both positive motivation *and* practical wisdom (understood as a component of skill(s) or know-how). But even if this is incorrect, and the rival composite model cannot appropriately accommodate the distinction in the standard way, it will still be a problem for the motivations model if it fails in this regard as well. We therefore have good reason to ask how a supporter of the motivations model should respond to this issue.

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<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that there will be a problem here even if the addition of practical wisdom is only one of the differences between the actual and natural virtues. For the suggestion that there could be other differences, see Russell (2009) p. 21 (especially footnote 36).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 19

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

A quick response here would be to simply deny that there is anything to be gained from making a distinction between what we can call “natural” and “actual” virtues. This is not the response that I want to consider here. Instead, it will be useful to think about why we might want such a distinction in the first place, before then asking whether or not the distinction can be made in a way that is compatible with the motivations model.

The standard Aristotelian way of distinguishing actual and natural virtues allows us to do three things. Firstly, it allows us to ensure that possessors of (actual) moral virtues will be reliably successful when acting. When distinguishing natural and actual virtues, Aristotle says of the natural virtues that:

one may be led astray by them, as a strong body which moves without sight may stumble badly because of its lack of sight, still, if a man once acquires reason, that makes a difference in his action; and his state, while still like what it was, will then be virtue in the strict sense.<sup>45</sup>

This idea is repeated by Russell, who says that natural virtues “are just as likely to go wrong as right”,<sup>46</sup> and by Annas, who points out that “a natural tendency to bravery can stumble unseeingly into ethical disaster”.<sup>47</sup> If we want it to be the case that truly virtuous agents are reliably successful when acting then it makes sense to distinguish actual virtues from the less reliable natural virtues. And making this distinction with reference to practical wisdom makes perfect sense, because the possession of practical wisdom is clearly something that we can expect to make an agent more reliably successful when acting. Therefore, one thing that the Aristotelian version of the distinction between actual and natural virtues allows us to do is to maintain the idea that truly virtuous agents will be more reliable when acting.

A second benefit of the standard distinction is that it helps to make sense of the intuition that children and non-human animals would not be expected to possess actual moral virtues. For those who have this intuition, the idea that actual virtue (as opposed to natural virtue) requires practical wisdom will make perfect sense. We cannot expect

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<sup>45</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 157 [Book 6, Chapter 13]

<sup>46</sup> Russell (2009) p. 20

<sup>47</sup> Annas (2011) p. 86

children and non-human animals to possess the cognitive capacities involved in practical wisdom and so this explains the intuition that children and non-human animals cannot be expected to possess actual moral virtues.<sup>48</sup> If we agree with this intuition then we will have a further reason to accept the standard distinction.

A third, and final, benefit of having a distinction between actual and natural virtues is that it allows us to make sense of the intuition that the possession of (actual) moral virtue will usually require a significant period of development. The idea that genuine virtue will need to be developed over time has been discussed in detail by Zagzebski, as well as being a major theme in the work of Annas.<sup>49</sup> The basic idea here is that we would not expect someone to become truly virtuous overnight, or that genuine virtue could be present “from the very moment of birth”. Distinguishing actual from natural virtues allows us to make sense of this fact, and the Aristotelian version of the distinction makes particular sense given that we would also expect the possession of practical wisdom to be something that is developed over time. Distinguishing between actual and natural virtues therefore allows us to: (i) ensure that truly virtuous agents will be reliably successful when acting; (ii) explain the intuition that children and non-human animals cannot be expected to possess actual virtues; and (iii) explain the fact that actual virtue will usually need to be developed over time. Rather than denying the need for any such distinction, it would be better if we could come up with a way of understanding the distinction that is compatible with the motivations model.

The motivations model says that possessing a moral virtue is to possess a deep motivation towards some characteristic end. The virtue of kindness might consist of a deep motivation towards the protection and promotion of well-being, while the virtue of justice might consist of a deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes. I explained above that a deep motivation is one that is sufficiently persistent, strongly felt, and robust. I now want to suggest that we can refer to motivations which fail to be sufficiently persistent, strongly felt, or robust as being *shallow* motivations. There is, then, three ways in which a motivation may come to be classed as shallow. The first is when the

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<sup>48</sup> Children and animals are discussed, for example, by Annas (2011) pp. 85–68, and by Hursthouse (1999) pp. 142–145.

<sup>49</sup> Annas (2011), and Zagzebski (1996) Part II, Section 2.5

motivation is problematically fleeting or sporadic. An agent's motivation to ensure fair outcomes will be shallow if it only lasts for a few hours, or if it comes and goes according to their mood. The second way is when the motivation is problematically weak. An agent's motivation to ensure fair outcomes will be shallow if it is so weakly felt that it never actually prompts them into action. And the third way is when the motivation is easily overridden or defeated by competing considerations. An agent's motivation to ensure fair outcomes will be shallow if it is always defeated by their competing motivation to make as much money as possible. If an agent's motivation is insufficient in (at least) one of these three ways then it ought to be classed as being a shallow motivation.

I propose that an alternative way of understanding the distinction between actual and natural moral virtues is by reference to the depth of an agent's motivation. Actual moral virtues will be those motivations (towards virtuous ends) which are sufficiently deep, while natural virtues will be those motivations (towards virtuous ends) which are problematically shallow.<sup>50</sup> While this way of understanding the distinction is markedly different from the standard Aristotelian approach, I will now show that it is compatible with the reasons that were highlighted above for why we might want to maintain a distinction between actual and natural virtues.

The first appealing feature of this distinction was that it allows us to maintain that possessors of actual moral virtues will be reliably successful when acting, whereas possessors of mere natural virtues may not be. If we make the distinction with reference to the depth of an agent's motivation then we will still be able to explain this fact. I have already spent a considerable amount of time in this chapter arguing that a deep motivation can, in general, be expected to make an agent reliably successful in pursuing their ends, and so I will not repeat those points here. It seems equally clear that the possessor of a shallow motivation cannot be expected to be reliable in achieving their virtuous ends. If an agent's motivation to ensure fair outcomes is fleeting or sporadic, if it is only weakly felt, or if it is easily overridden by competing interests, then we cannot expect them to do the things that will be required in order to actually ensure fair

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<sup>50</sup> I add "towards virtuous ends" here simply as a reminder that not all deep motivations will be actual moral virtues and not all shallow motivations will be natural moral virtues.

outcomes on a regular basis. Those with a deep motivation *can* be expected to be more reliable in this way, while those with a shallow motivation cannot. Therefore, if we want our distinction between actual and natural moral virtues to explain the greater reliability of those with actual virtues, then my proposed version of the distinction will be able to satisfy this requirement.

The second appealing feature of the actual/natural virtue distinction is that it helps to explain the intuition that children and non-human animals are not expected to possess actual moral virtues. And this intuition can be equally well explained by focusing on the depth of motivation that is required for moral virtue on the motivations model. It is plausible to suggest that children and non-human animals will tend to be incapable of motivations that are deep enough to count as being moral virtues. It would be unusual, for example, for a child to possess a sufficiently persistent and robust motivation towards a plausibly virtuous end. We suspect, rather, that a child will be easily distracted when trying to help others, or that they will be more easily influenced to give up and pursue some other motivation instead. Of course, it will not be *impossible* for a child to possess a sufficiently deep motivation. There may well be children who possess a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being, for example. If so, then they ought to be credited with the actual virtue, and even defenders of an Aristotelian approach accept that this can be the correct result in some cases.<sup>51</sup> The intuition is simply that children (and non-human animals) are unlikely to be capable of anything more than natural virtue, and the proposed version of the distinction is able to agree with this.

The third, and final, appealing feature of the standard actual/natural virtue distinction is that it allows us to explain why the possession of actual virtues will tend to require a significant period of development. We certainly would not expect it to be possible for someone to suddenly find themselves in possession of a moral virtue, or that someone might have a virtue “from the very moment of birth”. And the proposed understanding of the distinction can accommodate this fact. It is perhaps possible for someone to

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<sup>51</sup> For example, Hursthouse has a very different understanding of the actual/natural distinction from what is being proposed here, but she agrees that any statement about children being incapable of actual virtue will only be true “for the most part”. She recounts the story of Iqbal Masih in order to make this point. See Hursthouse (1999) pp. 143–144.

simply find themselves with a motivation towards a plausibly virtuous end. We can imagine an agent waking up one morning in a good mood and being motivated to do something to make the world a fairer or better place, such as in the following example from Arpaly:

*Whim.* [I]magine the person who acts benevolently on a whim. It is Sunday morning and she is awakened by a call from a charity asking for a donation. Our agent thinks, “Why not do something right?” and is moved to do something right so long as her credit card happens to be close enough to the bed.<sup>52</sup>

Examples such as *Whim* suggest that it is possible for an agent to suddenly possess a shallow motivation towards a plausibly virtuous end, such as the protection and promotion of well-being or the ensuring of fair outcomes. However, this is less likely in the case of deep motivations. When confronted with the suffering of another, an agent may simply find themselves with a strong motivation to alleviate that suffering. However, in order to have a tendency to alleviate suffering that is sufficiently persistent, strong and robust (that is, in order to have the moral virtue of compassion) agents will typically need to have been habituated in much the same way as the more typical proponents of the actual/natural distinction have in mind. An agent might spend time thinking about role models who have worked tirelessly to alleviate suffering, or rehearsing arguments against egoism and in favour of compassion, or they might regularly bring to mind instances of hardship that provoke and make resolute their disposition to help. In these ways and others, an agent may be able to deepen their motivation to alleviate suffering to a point that is sufficient for virtue, but such a process is unlikely to occur overnight. The proposed version of the actual/natural virtue distinction is therefore capable of explaining the intuition that actual virtue will require time to develop. This means that the approach of distinguishing actual and natural virtues by focusing on the depth of an agent’s motivation is able to maintain all three appealing features of the standard distinction.

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<sup>52</sup> Arpaly (2002) p. 87

The aim of this section has been to discuss the distinction between actual and natural moral virtues and to show that it is possible to make that distinction in a way that is compatible with the motivations model. By focusing on the depth of an agent's motivation, it is possible to distinguish actual and natural moral virtues in a way that retains appealing features of the standard Aristotelian approach to this issue. Of course, it may be that the approach that I have proposed ought not to adopt the terminology of "actual" and "natural" virtues. Those terms may be wedded to the specific Aristotelian approach which necessarily involves an appeal to practical wisdom. An alternative suggestion would be to instead refer to shallow motivations towards virtuous ends as being "proto-virtues" in the sense that these will require improvement in order to count as actual moral virtues. Regardless of the terms that we choose to use, the arguments in this section have shown that the motivations model is able to explain those same features of moral virtue that we would want a distinction between actual and natural virtues to pick up on. Therefore, considerations involving this distinction do not provide good reason to reject the motivations model of the moral virtues.

### 2.3 VIRTUE AND THE CELEBRATION OF IRRATIONALITY

The final objection to the motivations model that will be discussed in this chapter stems from considerations in Russell's *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*. In Chapter 11 of this work, Russell discusses an account of virtue that he calls "the trajectories view".<sup>53</sup> In this section I want to set out one of the objections that Russell raises for the trajectories view, explain why we might think that a similar objection can be directed towards the motivations model, and then defend the motivations model against that possible objection.

According to Russell, the trajectories view of the moral virtues understands the virtues as issuing in fixed outcomes, such as the reliable performance or avoidance of particular actions. Russell says:

the trajectories view defines a virtue as a disposition to manifest a certain range of behaviour; for instance, such a view understands the virtue of

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<sup>53</sup> Russell (2009) pp. 342–348

generosity as the disposition to give one's time and belongings to others, either much of the time or on a wide range of occasions.<sup>54</sup>

For another example, the trajectories view would understand the virtue of honesty as the brute disposition to avoid the act of lying or the breaking of promises. The stronger the disposition to perform the relevant act (such as giving away one's possessions or avoiding lying), the more impressive is the agent's corresponding virtue.<sup>55</sup> Russell is strongly opposed to such an account, and one of the arguments given against it accuses the view of the celebration of irrationality. If virtues are simply dispositions to perform certain actions then the strongest form of a virtue will be akin to a "psychological compulsion". This worry is explained in the following way:

Consider the difference between acting for a reason and, say, acting from compulsion, such as flipping a light switch three times when entering a dark room. It is clear that there is no arguing a person out of a compulsion, not simply because the person *will not* be persuaded by our argument, but because the person *cannot* be so persuaded on this point... Presumably, no such tendency [to perform acts relevant to generosity] would be stronger than a psychological compulsion to give whenever one perceived another's good.<sup>56</sup>

An agent's disposition to perform actions of a particular sort will be stronger if they could not be convinced to do otherwise, and this will be true when they act out of a psychological compulsion rather than in response to actual reasons (which could perhaps be defeated or forgotten). Therefore, if virtue is simply a tendency to perform actions of a particular sort, then agents will be more virtuous the closer they are to acting from compulsion and the further they are from acting for reasons. As Russell says, "an implication of such a view is that one should be the more generous, the less rational one's motivation for giving to others; and surely that cannot be right."<sup>57</sup> So, we ought to reject the trajectories view on the grounds that it would celebrate and promote irrationality in the place of perfect moral virtue.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 347

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 345 (Russell attributes this view to James Wallace.)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 344–345

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 345



I agree with Russell that we ought to reject the trajectories view, understood as explaining virtues in terms of a tendency to perform particular actions. I have no interest, then, in attempting to defend such a view. However, we might worry that the objection raised by Russell for the trajectories view could be equally well directed towards the motivations model. The motivations model tells us that the moral virtues are persistent, strongly felt, and robust motivations towards particular ends. Might it be the case that the most persistent, strong, and robust motivation that an agent could possess would be something like a psychological compulsion to achieve the particular end? For example, might an agent's motivation to alleviate suffering be more persistent and robust if they are utterly invulnerable to competing reasons in the same way that a person with a psychological compulsion is expected to be? And if so, should the motivations model then be rejected on the grounds that it would celebrate and promote irrationality in the place of moral virtue?

A first response to this worry is to cast doubt on the likely stability of such irrational compulsions. Imagine having the opportunity to take part in a potentially beneficial collaborative project with another person, where that project entails a level of risk for both parties. When deciding whether or not to get involved, we would be reassured to hear the reasons that ground the other person's motivation to complete the project. On hearing these reasons and learning about what the other person takes to be at stake in the project, we may become convinced that they will not abandon us before the project has been completed. On the other hand, if we find out that the other person is motivated by a mere psychological compulsion, we will be wary that their motivation to complete the project could simply vanish without warning. If the motivation is not grounded by any reason then we will be concerned that it may also vanish without any reason, and so we will be less inclined to participate. Similarly, when we hear that an agent's motivation to, for example, alleviate suffering is not grounded by any reasons and is instead a mere irrational compulsion, we will rightly worry that this motivation could be lost at a moment's notice. That we would have such worries tells us that we do not trust the reliability or stability of mere compulsions and that such compulsions would not be expected to meet the persistence requirement that the motivations model

demands. It is unlikely, therefore, that the motivations model would find itself praising as virtuous the possession of irrational compulsions.

However, these considerations do nothing to show that it would be *impossible* for a compulsive motivation towards some end to meet the required levels of persistence (or of strength or robustness). It is important, therefore, to do more to defend the motivations model against the charge of celebrating irrationality. And an important element of that defence is to point out that the motivations model would not encourage irrationality to the same extent as the trajectories view. On that view, a moral virtue could consist of a tendency to perform certain actions, and the irrational compulsion to perform those actions would then be sufficient for virtue. For example, the compulsive tendency to give away money could be classed as virtuous generosity. This tendency could involve no reasoning at all on the part of the agent. In contrast, the kind of trait classed as a virtue by the motivations model will actively *encourage* the agent to reason in various ways. The agent is not driven towards basic or narrow ends (such as giving away money or flipping a light switch) but rather towards open or broad ends which are compatible with a great many different ways of proceeding. The agent with a deep motivation towards the protection and promotion of well-being, for example, will be driven to engage in reasoning about what well-being might consist in for different beings, how it is generally possible to promote such well-being, and what skills they should try to develop in order to help them in their efforts. The open nature of the end in question leads the virtuous agent to take on the task of then evaluating different reasons and considerations, and responding to these when performing particular actions. This is far from the unthinking, reasons-invulnerable flipping of a switch or giving away of possessions that could be praised as a moral virtue on the trajectories view. By presenting an account of virtue that encourages an agent to engage in subsequent reasoning when performing particular actions, the motivations model does enough to protect itself from the charge of celebrating irrationality.

There is one form of irrationality which it is possible may be compatible with moral virtue according to the motivations model. Such irrationality would occur at the more fundamental level of deciding which ends to be directed towards in the first place. It

looks to be compatible with the motivations model that an agent could possess the virtue of kindness (for example) even if their commitment to protect and promote well-being was irrational in the sense that they could not be persuaded through rational argument to stop thinking of this as a valuable end. Even if the commitment is invulnerable to reason (although compatible with encouraging the agent to reason when determining how best to proceed), the motivations model may accept that the agent possesses the virtue of kindness (assuming that the sufficient levels of persistence, strength, and robustness are also met). We ought to be happy to accept this conclusion, and it would be uncharitable to read this as the motivations model championing irrationality over rationality. Given that compulsive motivations are unlikely to meet the persistence requirement for virtue, that the virtuous agent will be driven to engage in reasoning when deciding how to proceed, and that there is no suggestion that a motivation based on compulsion will be preferable to one grounded in reasons, the motivations model should not be thought of as vulnerable to the objection that Russell raises for the trajectories view.

I have now considered three of the most serious objections that have been raised for accounts of moral virtue such as the motivations model. Demonstrating that responses to these objections are available actually strengthens the position of the motivations model in two ways. Most obviously, the defence of the motivations model shows that this model is less vulnerable than may have been assumed, and that it ought to be accepted as a serious contender in the virtue theory debate. In addition to this, a successful defence of the motivations model also increases pressure on the rival composite model of the moral virtues. We saw in the previous chapter that the composite model will be vulnerable to the charge of elitism unless it can provide some justification for requiring an intellectually demanding component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. And that justification becomes more difficult to provide once we have shown that there is a plausible alternative account of virtue which does not demand a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. The arguments put forward in defence of the motivations model are therefore doubly important in helping us to decide between different options within virtue theory. Having provided this defence, I want to now end

this chapter by considering some of the positive implications of accepting the motivations model.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE MOTIVATIONS MODEL**

The motivations model of the moral virtues has not been popular in recent times. Most virtue theorists have endorsed a neo-Aristotelian position whereby moral virtue requires practical wisdom, and, as we saw in Chapter One, a significant amount of work has also focused on the connection between virtues and cognitive skills. Indeed, the sufficiency of a model of virtue that omits a necessary component of wisdom or cognitive skill is likely to be viewed as an extremely surprising (or even implausible) result by most of those currently working in virtue theory and virtue ethics. For this reason, the most important task for a supporter of the motivations model is a defensive one. The largest section of this chapter has focused on responding to serious objections to this approach (and a further possible objection will be discussed in Chapter Four). However, it is also important to carry out the more positive task of highlighting possible implications of accepting the motivations model. That is the aim of this section.

This chapter has already identified several ways in which the motivations model implies or is compatible with intuitive truths about the moral virtues that would be accepted by most virtue theorists. Some examples of these truths are the following:

- (i) Possessors of a moral virtue are more likely to be reliably successful in achieving their virtuous ends.
- (ii) Moral virtues are firm and relatively unchanging aspects of an agent's character.
- (iii) The development of a moral virtue will usually require a period of time and habituation.
- (iv) Possession of genuine moral virtue is unlikely in (at least very young) children and non-human animals.
- (v) There exist traits which can be referred to as “natural” or “proto-virtues”, and these can sometimes be developed into genuine moral virtues.

The motivations model is also in-keeping with Aristotle's claim that moral virtue involves aiming “at the right mark”, and I have suggested that plausibly virtuous ends

might include the protection and promotion of well-being (for the virtue of kindness) and the ensuring of fair outcomes (for the virtue of justice).<sup>58</sup> And, of course, the motivations model is compatible with the main finding from Chapter One that virtue possession must involve a significant element of motivation in order to rule out the possibility of virtuous agents who are non-instrumentally motivated in non-virtuous ways. The virtue of compassion is not compatible with the non-instrumental motivation to cause suffering, for example. In all of these ways, the motivations model is compatible with intuitively correct and widely-held beliefs regarding the moral virtues.

One important claim that is compatible with the motivations model (and which was highlighted in Section 2.1, above) is less likely to be widely accepted by rival virtue theorists. When discussing the possibility of an agent who fails to be reliably successful due to their inability to work out the proper means for achieving their goals, I approvingly quoted Hume as saying that:

I am more to be lamented than blamed, if I am mistaken with regard to the influence of objects in producing pain or pleasure, or if I know not the proper means of satisfying my desires. No one can ever regard such errors as a defect in my moral character.<sup>59</sup>

It is an important benefit of the motivations model that it is able to accommodate the idea that a lack of ability in working out how best to proceed should not necessarily be taken to reveal a defect in an agent's moral character. Suppose that an agent's moral character is praiseworthy to the extent that they possess moral virtues and defective to the extent that they lack those virtues. If possessing a moral virtue requires that an agent possess cognitive skills or know-how (such as knowing how best to achieve some end or being skilled in predicting the likely consequences of available actions) then those who fail in this regard will necessarily be lacking in moral virtue. And if the possession of moral virtue determines an agent's moral character, then we will have to say that those who lack these skills will to that extent be defective in their moral character. In other words, we will be unable to accept the important point just mentioned. The motivations

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<sup>58</sup> Aristotle states that "virtue makes us aim at the right mark" in Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 155 [1144<sup>a</sup>7–9].

<sup>59</sup> Hume (as printed 2011) p. 401 [Book 3, Part 1, Section 1]

model, by denying the necessity of a component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how, allows us to avoid this problem. It allows us, therefore, to accept the Humean idea that failures in reasoning ability or know-how should not necessarily be taken to reveal a defect in an agent's moral character.

I want to conclude this section by highlighting two further implications of accepting the motivations model, as well as some directions for future research that are suggested by these implications. The first of these final two points is to note the relative inclusivity of the motivations model. When setting out the elitism worry for the composite model in Chapter Two, I listed individuals who would be ruled out as potential possessors of moral virtue on that account. In addition to children and non-human animals, the composite model also rules out those with cognitive disabilities or mental illnesses. And many other adult human beings can also be expected to fail to possess the required levels of cognitive skill or know-how. In contrast to this, many who could not even potentially possess any moral virtues on competing accounts *might* be classed as morally virtuous on the motivations model. All that is required to be a potential possessor of moral virtue is the ability to have motivations that are sufficiently persistent, strongly felt and robust. If you are capable of deep motivations then you just need to make sure that you have those deep motivations that are directed towards morally virtuous ends. It seems likely that the set of individuals who can possess motivations of this type will be larger than the set of individuals who possess the levels of cognitive skill and know-how required by competing approaches. The set may therefore include individuals from within those groups that were previously excluded from the realm of virtue, such as children or those with cognitive disabilities. Our idea of moral exemplars may then have to be altered in order to include such individuals alongside the more standardly accepted Socratic figures. This ought to encourage future work on the moral virtues to consider what might be learned from such individuals, and to acknowledge their moral value in a more complete way than is currently evidenced in the work of many contemporary virtue theorists.

The second of the final two implications that I want to briefly highlight concerns possible education policy. There has been a recent upsurge in interest regarding both the

possibility and the desirability of educating for good character, and this should encourage us to think about the corresponding possibility and desirability of educating for moral (and intellectual) virtues.<sup>60</sup> The motivations model tells us that educating for moral virtue will involve educating for the possession of deep motivations. This means that those interested in the possibility of character education will be required to focus on how individuals might be led to possess deep motivations towards virtuous ends. For example, educating for the virtue of kindness will necessarily involve educating people in a way that leads them to develop a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. It seems likely that this will involve something more than simply providing individuals with information about what well-being consists in and how best to perform actions that generally promote it. Character education must involve making people *want to work out* the answers to certain relevant questions, rather than simply providing those answers. This might turn out to be a more difficult task, and the level of difficulty (as well as the processes involved) will impact upon the desirability of trying to educate for good character.<sup>61</sup> The answers to these questions are not obvious and will require input from educational theorists as well as virtue theorists. I do not intend to address these questions here, although the issue is one that I hope to investigate in future work. In the meantime, it is simply worth highlighting the fact that claims regarding character education will be rendered more or less plausible depending on the conception of moral virtue that we have in mind. This is therefore one further area where we will need to be aware of the choices that we are making at the level of virtue theory.

This section has set out some of the implications that stem from accepting the motivations model, as well as some of the areas for future research that are suggested by such acceptance. The motivations model gains further plausibility by being compatible with many widely accepted beliefs regarding the nature of moral virtue.

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<sup>60</sup> For example, see the papers included in recent special issues of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, (2013), edited by Ben Kotzee, and of *Theory and Research in Education*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (2014), edited by Randall Curren and Ben Kotzee. For more evidence of this growing trend towards character education, see the resources provided by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues based at the University of Birmingham ([www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)) as well as comments made by political figures, such as Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt (reported by the BBC at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-26140607](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-26140607) and accessed 20/02/2014).

<sup>61</sup> I have an engaged with one potentially worrying aspect of a non-traditional approach to character education in Wilson (2014). This paper is a response to Sparrow (2014).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

I have now evaluated three different accounts of the nature of the moral virtues. In Chapter One I argued against the skills model of the moral virtues, and suggested that the problems faced by that approach could be solved by demanding a significant motivational component for moral virtue. Chapter Two examined the composite model of the moral virtues, and argued that considerations stemming from the virtues of ignorance and the worry of elitism provide us with good reason to consider an alternative approach. In particular, we had good reason to consider the merits of an approach which does not demand a necessary component of cognitive skill(s) or know-how. In this chapter I have set out the motivations model of the moral virtues, on which a moral virtue consists of a deep motivation towards some characteristic end. I have defended this account against three serious objections, as well as highlighting some positive implications of accepting the account. The points made in this chapter ought to be enough to demonstrate that the motivations model is a legitimate contender in this debate, and a live option for those working within virtue theory. I now want to build on this suggestion by doing some work in order to demonstrate in more detail what a version of the motivations model might look like. This will involve asking *which* deep motivations ought to be accepted as being actual moral virtues. However, before doing this, it will be necessary to first discuss a particularly problematic candidate moral virtue.



## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROBLEM OF COURAGE

### 0. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I want to consider one further possible objection to the motivations model of the moral virtues. The motivations model states that the possession of a moral virtue consists in the possession of a deep motivation towards some characteristic end. For example, the candidate moral virtue of kindness can be understood as the deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. Such an account is incompatible with the existence of moral virtues which are not directed towards any characteristic end or target. For that reason, it is important to consider the trait of courage. As will be explained below, the trait of courage does not appear to be directed towards any characteristic end. And yet, the virtue status of courage has been widely accepted. Courage, therefore, serves as a possible counter-example to the motivations model. I will explain the problem faced by the motivations model in more detail as well as suggesting that the trait of courage may also be problematic for other accounts. Importantly, my response to this problem will then involve proposing and defending an alternative account of the trait of courage on which courage is *not* a moral virtue. Courage ought instead to be understood as an *enabler* for the moral virtues. Having defended the plausibility of this approach, I will then explain how it might be applied to other potentially problematic traits.

### 1. COURAGE AS A MORAL VIRTUE

The trait of courage would not provide a significant challenge to the motivations model if there was not a widespread acceptance of the fact that courage is indeed a moral virtue. That there is such a widespread acceptance can be shown by surveying just a handful of those theorists who have discussed the trait. Of course, courage is listed among the cardinal virtues by Plato, and is discussed at some length by Aristotle under the description of a moral virtue.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary virtue theorists have been equally accommodating of the trait, with Linda Zagzebski claiming that “To think of virtue is almost immediately to think of particular traits such as courage”<sup>2</sup> and Robert Roberts

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<sup>1</sup> See Plato (trans. Lee) (1987) pp. 158–160 [Book IV, 441c–442d] and Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 63–72 [Book III]

<sup>2</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 134

asserting that “whatever else courage may be, it is a virtue”.<sup>3</sup> Wayne Riggs sums up the general assumption in favour of courage when saying that “no one would be willing to accept a theory that failed to count courage as a moral virtue”.<sup>4</sup>

The widespread agreement in favour of the virtue status of courage suggests that any failure to accommodate courage as a moral virtue will be a serious matter. At the very least, a proposed account of the nature of the virtues will not be able to respond to this issue by simply dismissing the idea that courage is a moral virtue. Instead, any theorist who wants to deny the virtue status of courage will need to provide a plausible account of courage as a non-virtue, and this account will need to explain the widespread acceptance of the moral value of courage. However, it has not yet been fully explained why the trait of courage can be expected to cause problems for the motivations model. I will now set out the problem in more detail before then considering how best to respond.

## **2. THE PROBLEM OF COURAGE FOR THE MOTIVATIONS MODEL**

The motivations model states that all moral virtues consist of a deep motivation towards some characteristic end. On this account, the candidate virtue of kindness might consist of a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being, and the candidate virtue of justice might consist of a deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes. In this way, every moral virtue can be expected to be directed towards a characteristic end. However, this claim sits uneasily alongside the acceptance of courage as a moral virtue. While it is possible to come up with a characteristic end for other candidate moral virtues, the trait of courage does not appear to be directed towards any characteristic end or target. An agent can exhibit genuine courage in the pursuit of any number of different and unrelated ends. This suggests that the motivations model will struggle to accommodate courage as a moral virtue. We can refer to this issue as the *motivational problem* of courage.

The problematic nature of the motivational structure of courage has been highlighted by other theorists. For example, Robert Adams has pointed out that courage differs from

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<sup>3</sup> Roberts (1984) p. 231

<sup>4</sup> Riggs (2003) p. 206

other moral virtues because of the fact that it is not defined “by particular motives or by one’s main aims”.<sup>5</sup> Bernard Williams makes a similar point when saying that “there is no X” such that all courageous agents “choose their acts for X reasons”.<sup>6</sup> And Roberts and Wood argue that “Although courageous acts must be motivated, no one type of motivation is characteristic of courage.”<sup>7</sup> While kind agents must plausibly be motivated by considerations of well-being and just agents must plausibly be motivated by considerations of fairness, a courageous agent can demonstrate their courage in the pursuit of a wide variety of ends. If there is no characteristic end that is specific to the trait of courage then the motivations model will be unable to accept the virtue status of this widely accepted candidate virtue. The motivational problem of courage poses a significant challenge to the motivations model.

I want to suggest that the motivations model can respond to the problematic nature of courage by maintaining that courage is not a moral virtue. This response will be set out in detail below. However, it is important to point out that other responses to this problem are available. Of course, a first possible response to the motivational problem is simply to abandon the motivations model. Virtue theorists will always have the option of endorsing a *pluralist* account of the virtues, on which not all moral virtues share the same nature. This is the approach taken by Adams in direct response to the problematic nature of courage. Adams posits that there are two different types of moral virtue – the “motivational virtues” (such as benevolence) which are directed towards a good characteristic end, and the “structural virtues” (such as courage) which are not defined in terms of any characteristic end.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Roberts and Wood suggest that we ought to reject the idea that all of the virtues can be accommodated within a “one-size-fits-all” or “monolithic” account of the nature of virtue.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence, therefore, that some contemporary theorists have been led to endorse a pluralist understanding of the nature

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<sup>5</sup> Adams (2006) p. 33

<sup>6</sup> Williams (1995) p. 19

<sup>7</sup> Roberts and Wood (2007) p. 76

<sup>8</sup> Adams (2006) p. 33 (A similar point is made by those who hold that courage belongs to a separate class of “executive” virtues. See, for example, Pears (1978) and Williams (1981) p. 49.)

<sup>9</sup> Roberts and Wood (2007) pp. 79–80

of the virtues.<sup>10</sup> By accepting this approach, it would be possible to avoid the motivational problem of courage.

I will not be arguing directly against pluralist approaches in this work. At most, it seems as if a direct challenge to pluralism would consist of accusing pluralist approaches of being unsatisfyingly *ad hoc*. If we change our account of the nature of the virtues whenever we want to accommodate some additional trait then the underlying account itself will lack any explanatory power. This objection may be what Zagzebski has in mind when arguing that pluralist accounts of the virtues “should only be taken as a last resort”.<sup>11</sup> A further direct objection to pluralism would be that it makes it difficult to rule out *any* character trait as a potential moral virtue. Once we accept that specific moral virtues can differ in significant ways, it becomes possible to accommodate any problematic trait as being simply a different *type* of virtue. Such a possibility ought to at least make us suspicious of the pluralist approach. However, direct objections to pluralism will not be my main focus here. Instead, the work carried out in this chapter (and in the previous chapter) challenges pluralism indirectly. The switch to a pluralist account will be unnecessary if we can demonstrate the acceptability of a uniform understanding of the moral virtues. By defending the motivations model against serious objections, I aim to demonstrate the acceptability of this account. If the defence is successful then we will have no reason to abandon the uniform motivations model in favour of a pluralist approach. In this way, the defence of the motivations model provides an indirect response to pluralism. Of course, if that defence proves to be unconvincing then pluralism regarding the nature of the virtues may be the only remaining option.

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<sup>10</sup> It may be worth noting that the “pluralism” being discussed here appears to be different from that present in the account offered by Christine Swanton in *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (2003). Swanton *does* propose a one-size-fits-all account of the virtues in the sense that every virtue “is a disposition to respond well to the ‘demands of the world’” (p. 21) or “more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way.” (p. 19). Swanton’s account is pluralistic in two different ways. Firstly, a given virtue may have a plurality of items within its field. Secondly, there may be a plurality of appropriate responses to these items, including (for example) maximising the thing in question, as well as honouring or respecting the thing in question. These features make an account pluralistic in ways that are different from the pluralism endorsed by Adams or Roberts and Wood.

<sup>11</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 135

We ought not to switch to a pluralist understanding of the nature of the moral virtues unless we accept that uniform approaches, such as the motivations model, are unsuccessful. How else, then, might a defender of the motivations model respond to the motivational problem of courage? One option will be to deny that courage differs from other candidate moral virtues. Someone might claim that courage does indeed have a characteristic end towards which the virtuously courageous agent will necessarily be motivated. This is the position held by Zagzebski. However, while Zagzebski does attempt to discuss the motivational component of courage, she is only able to say that it will involve “emotions characteristic of the virtue of courage” and admits that it is difficult to be any more specific.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of a positive proposal, it is difficult to imagine the end towards which a courageous agent will necessarily be motivated. Williams is surely correct in ruling out “being courageous” as the end towards which a courageous agent must be motivated.<sup>13</sup> Even if it will sometimes be possible for the courageous agent to have this end in mind, this will only be so in certain special cases, such as when the agent is purposely facing down a challenge so as to improve or to display their courage.<sup>14</sup> In general, an agent can perfectly well possess courage without happening to be motivated to “be courageous”. For example, a parent protecting their child from a wild animal can perfectly well possess courage even if the motivation to “be courageous” is not one that they possess. We therefore have reason to reject this suggestion for the characteristic end of the trait of courage. It is plausible that the difficulty (shared and acknowledged by Zagzebski) in explaining the characteristic end of courage stems from the fact that there is no such characteristic motivational end. If so, then this response to the motivational problem of courage will not be successful.

Of course, any survey of possible characteristic ends for the trait of courage will struggle to be exhaustive. It will always be possible to propose some other characteristic end for courage, and the motivations model will only face a significant challenge here if all such proposals prove to be unconvincing. This is an important point in favour of my overall project of defending the motivations model. However, for now I want to accept the charge that the trait of courage has no characteristic end and so cannot easily be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 131 (and footnote 29 on that page) and p. 251

<sup>13</sup> Williams (1995) p. 16

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 19

accommodated by the motivations model. Having done so, it becomes important to consider the option of denying the virtue status of courage. Before considering this response, however, I want to first point out that the motivations model is not the only account that has reason to consider denying the virtue status of this widely accepted candidate virtue.

### **3. A SHARED PROBLEM**

The motivations model of the moral virtues is not alone in facing a challenge from the trait of courage. If we accept the claim that there is no end that is characteristic to the trait of courage then this will pose a problem for any account of the moral virtues which includes reference to some characteristic motivational end. This includes the rival composite model of the moral virtues that was the focus of Chapter Two. The apparent difference in the motivational structure of courage when compared to other candidate moral virtues therefore poses a general problem for accounts of the virtues that require a necessary motivational component. I now want to highlight one further difference between courage and other candidate moral virtues, and to suggest that this provides us with further reason to consider the option of denying the virtue status of courage.

A second problematic feature of the trait of courage is suggested in the work of Philippa Foot. Foot highlights the possibility of cases where an agent possesses genuine courage but where there appears to be nothing morally valuable about that possession. We are asked to “Suppose for instance that a sordid murder were in question, say a murder done for gain or to get an inconvenient person out of the way, but that this murder had to be done in alarming circumstances or in the face of real danger.”<sup>15</sup> It appears that carrying out such a murder will require the possession of courage, but the nature of the act in question may leave us uneasy regarding the moral value of the agent’s character. To Foot’s example of the apparently courageous murderer we can add the possibility of a courageous burglar, terrorist, or super-villain. If such cases are accepted as being conceptually possible then this supports the idea that the possession of courage can sometimes be lacking in moral worth. And yet, the possibility of virtue possession being without moral worth appears less likely for other candidate moral virtues such as

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<sup>15</sup> Foot (2002) p. 15

kindness or compassion. We can refer to this as the *value problem* of courage. The value problem highlights a further possible difference between courage and other candidate virtues, in addition to the difference previously identified by the motivational problem. I will consider two possible responses to the value problem before then going on to endorse the idea that we should deny the virtue status of the trait of courage.

The value problem suggests that the trait of courage is more prone to problematic examples than are other candidate moral virtues. Even if a kind agent's attempts to promote well-being can sometimes go awry (as in the *Hitchhiker* example in the previous chapter), there still appears to be something morally valuable about the agent's kindness. In contrast with this, the courage of a murderer or a terrorist does not appear to provide us with good reason to judge such agents as morally worthy. A first possible response to this issue is to deny that such problematic cases provide us with examples of genuine courage. That is, we can deny that it is possible for a murderer or terrorist (or supervillain) to possess genuine courage. If we do this then we will be able to deny the main claim of the value problem to the effect that courage is more prone to problematic examples than are other candidate moral virtues.

It is not clear that this response to the value problem will be intuitively appealing. Indeed, examples such as courageous terrorists and courageous burglars have proven to be controversial in recent years.<sup>16</sup> However, support for the idea that these agents cannot possess genuine courage can be found in the work of contemporary virtue theorists. If we accept a demanding account of the nature of courage then it will be possible to rule out such problematic cases. Julia Annas claims that "the truly brave person has a better and more intelligent grasp on what things are worth risk and daring and what are not."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Paul Bloomfield has suggested that genuine courage requires "both an ability to discern real from apparent danger and knowledge of what is of value in life".<sup>18</sup> If we agree with this then we will be able to deny the possibility of problematic examples of courage. It is plausible that neither the murderer nor the

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<sup>16</sup> UK Prime Minister David Cameron sparked debate in 2012 when suggesting that burglars could not be courageous but were instead cowards. In contrast, US television host Bill Maher caused controversy when saying that those responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks were *not* cowards.

<sup>17</sup> Annas (2011) p. 86

<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield (2013) p. 295

terrorist are exhibiting “knowledge of what is of value in life” and so neither will be classed as genuinely virtuous according to Annas and Bloomfield. Furthermore, this general approach will be appealing to those who already endorse an account of the virtues such as the skills or composite models. These approaches already demand an element of cognitive skill on the part of the virtuous agent, and so demanding that the agent be able to work out “what things are worth risk and daring and what are not” will be perfectly acceptable on such accounts. If we agree, then it will be possible to avoid the value problem of courage.

However, there is a problem with this response to the value problem. Claiming that genuinely courageous agents will always be responsive to what is of (actual) value in life does not appear to be in-keeping with how we would decide who is or is not courageous in any given case. Suppose, for example, that we are asked to judge which soldiers on a particular battlefield are genuinely courageous. This task will not be made easier once we are told that one side is furthering a just cause (and so pursuing an actually valuable outcome) and the other is furthering an unjust cause (and so pursuing an outcome that is not valuable). Indeed, it is not clear that this information will be of any use at all. The soldiers on the unjust side are not thereby less able to be courageous, even if this is what would be suggested by the claim that true courage requires that an agent be in pursuit of actually valuable ends. Whether or not an individual soldier can possess courage should not be entirely determined by which side of the battlefield they happen to be on. If we think that soldiers in unjust wars will be furthering ends that aren’t valuable, and if we accept that genuine courage is not possible in the pursuit of non-valuable ends, then we would need to deny this intuitive claim. This would be a significant downside of accepting the current response to the value problem.

A defender of the view suggested by the quotes from Annas and Bloomfield may well agree with the idea that whether or not an agent is courageous should not be determined by which side of the battlefield they happen to be on. They can argue that the ends of the individual soldier may not match the unjust ends of their commanding officers or government. Instead, individual soldiers will be directed towards their own individual ends. If we accept the idea that courage requires being responsive to ends that are of



genuine value, then we will need to know the ends of each individual soldier (as well as whether or not those ends are truly valuable) before we can make a judgement regarding that soldier's courage.

Even with this clarification in mind, the view suggested by Annas and Bloomfield is not intuitively appealing. When asked to judge which soldiers on a particular battlefield are genuinely courageous, we will now have to keep in mind that different soldiers may be directed towards different ends. It will be necessary to work out which end each soldier is directed towards, and whether or not that end is valuable, before we can make a judgement regarding that soldier's courage. Consider the following possible ends that an individual soldier might be directed towards: defending the security of the soldier's nation; defending the oppressed citizens of the opposing state; encouraging the spread of freedom of speech; encouraging the spread of democracy; encouraging the spread of a particular religion; expressing loyalty to their commanding officer; fulfilling contractual obligations; fulfilling obligations so that they can return home to their families; fulfilling obligations so that they can return home to finish off some jigsaw puzzle; and so on. On the view being suggested, it will be necessary for us to know which specific goal (or combination of specific goals) the soldier actually has in mind, and whether or not that goal can rightly be considered valuable. This does not look to be a plausible claim, either about how we would act if asked to identify courageous soldiers on the battlefield or about who can or cannot be genuinely courageous.<sup>19</sup> We therefore have reason to doubt the suggestion that an agent cannot be courageous unless they are directed towards and appreciative of ends that are of actual value. Denying that our problematic cases provide examples of genuine courage is not an intuitively appealing response to the value problem.

The value problem provides a *prima facie* challenge to accounts of the virtues because it suggests that the trait of courage differs significantly from other candidate moral virtues. I have suggested that we ought not to respond to this problem by denying that the

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, if absolute pacifism is the correct moral theory, then none of these possible ends would be sufficiently valuable to justify a resort to violence. The soldiers would then be demonstrating a lack of understanding of relative values and so could not be courageous on the suggested view. It does not seem plausible that the truth or falsity of absolute pacifism should determine whether or not any soldier has ever been courageous.

problematic examples provide us with cases of genuine courage. A second possible response to this problem is to deny that the examples are problematic. That is, it is possible to claim that courage is morally valuable even in cases such as the courageous murderer or the courageous terrorist. This is the response favoured by Zagzebski, who uses the courage of a Nazi soldier as an example.<sup>20</sup> Zagzebski argues that the ideally virtuous agent will possess courage and so any agent who happens to possess courage will thereby be closer to the moral ideal than they would be without it. Without courage “a person would have more moral work to do to attain a high level of moral worth” and so we ought to consider any possession of courage morally valuable.<sup>21</sup> If we agree with Zagzebski then we can deny that courage is especially prone to examples where its possession is lacking in moral worth, and so we will be able to avoid the value problem.

This second response to the value problem is also problematic. The main issue here is that Zagzebski’s response fails to be sensitive to the different ways in which (and different extents to which) different people might possess genuine courage. As Daniel Russell has pointed out, there is no “denying the overwhelming evidence that no courageous person (say) is courageous across all areas of his or her life, and it is pointless to stipulate that such a person therefore could not be ‘really’ courageous in any area at all.”<sup>22</sup> What these considerations (and everyday experience) highlight is that there are different ways in which an agent might be courageous. That an agent is courageous in one way (say, in a particular context or in response to a particular obstacle) does not guarantee that they will also be courageous in some other way. For example, an agent can be courageous on the battlefield and yet display a lack of courage when asked to speak in front of a large audience. That an agent is courageous when standing up for justice in their community tells us nothing about whether they will have the courage to be honest in their personal relationships. In response to this we could say that different agents can be expected to possess different *forms* of courage – some will be courageous regarding certain ends or contexts and others will be courageous regarding different

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<sup>20</sup> Zagzebski (1996) pp. 93–95 (This is also the favoured approach of Robert Adams, see Adams (2006) p. 32, and Ch. 10.)

<sup>21</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 93

<sup>22</sup> Russell (2009) p. 150

ends or contexts.<sup>23</sup> These considerations are important in telling against Zagzebski's response to the value problem.

Once we realise that it is possible to be courageous in different ways, or that it is possible to possess different forms of courage, the response from Zagzebski becomes less appealing. Even if we were to think that courage does in general make an agent closer to the moral ideal, it is far from obvious that this is true of the forms of courage that are possessed in Foot's example of the courageous murderer or in Zagzebski's example of the courageous Nazi. It does not appear to be the case that a virtuous agent needs to possess courage in the ways in which it is possessed in these examples. Consider the agent who is able to be courageous when avoiding prosecution for criminal acts, the agent who is courageous in furthering their own self-interest, or the agent who can courageously carry out acts of genocide. We have no reason to accept that an ideally virtuous agent would need to be courageous in these ways, or that the possession of such forms of courage would make an agent closer to some moral ideal. An agent who possesses only problematic forms of courage may even improve their moral character by losing such courage. Given this, we ought to maintain that it is possible to possess courage in a way that is morally problematic. We ought, therefore, to reject this possible response to the value problem.

To re-cap: the motivations model of the moral virtues faces a serious problem if we accept that the trait of courage (unlike other candidate virtues) is not directed towards any characteristic end or target. This is the motivational problem of courage, and is my main focus in this chapter. However, I have now suggested that the value problem of courage also challenges a variety of accounts of the moral virtues, and this will include the motivations model as well. It would be possible to avoid both of these problems by denying that the trait of courage is a moral virtue. However, the widespread acceptance of the virtue status of courage means that this approach will be controversial. It will be necessary to provide a plausible alternative account of the relationship between courage and the moral virtues, and this account will need to be capable of explaining the

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<sup>23</sup> Many other theorists have made and accepted this point regarding different forms of courage. For example, see Adams (2006) pp. 180–184, Putman (1997), and Doris (2002).

intuitions in favour of the virtue status of courage. I will now propose such an account. If successful, this account will provide us with a response to the problem(s) of courage.

#### **4. COURAGE AS AN ENABLER**

As was noted above, it is possible to possess different forms of courage, and the possession of a given form provides no guarantee that an agent will possess any other form. That we have witnessed an individual acting courageously on the battlefield tells us nothing about whether they will be courageous when asked to speak in front of a large audience. If there are different forms of courage that an agent can possess then to be courageous overall will be to possess a sufficient combination or collection of the various specific forms. It will be useful, therefore, to consider what might be involved in possessing a specific form of courage – in possessing courage regarding a particular context or a particular end. Having done this, it will then be possible to explain the connection between courage and the moral virtues. A plausible account of the possession of specific forms of courage is the following:

An agent is courageous regarding a particular context or end only when their motivations within that context or towards that end are not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk.

An agent is courageous regarding the end of protecting their family only when their motivation to do so is not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. An agent is courageous in the context of public speaking only when their motivations (whatever these may be) are not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk in such a context. An agent is courageous regarding the end of winning the affections of their beloved only when their motivation to do so is not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. In these cases, the sense of “defeat” that I have in mind should not be taken to imply that the motivation in question simply disappears. Instead, the motivation itself will remain, but the agent’s resolve in acting on the motivation (or in achieving the end of the motivation) will have been overridden by considerations of personal risk. With this in mind, we can say that an agent may be considered courageous overall if they are, in general, not dissuaded by considerations of personal risk.

It will be useful to clarify several aspects of this account before moving on to consider how it will allow us to explain the actual relationship between courage and the moral virtues. First of all, it is worth pointing out that the defeasibility of a given motivation is different from the felt strength of that motivation. It is possible to be very strongly motivated towards a particular end but for that motivation to be easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. This amounts to no more than highlighting the difference between apathy and cowardice. In cases of the former, an agent will not feel a sufficiently strong motivation, while in cases of the latter an agent may be very strongly motivated but this motivation is defeated by competing considerations. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that the understanding of “personal risk” that is in play here is relatively broad. For example, it is not the case that the agent must be concerned for their physical well-being. Instead, the risk to the agent might be professional (the loss of a job or of status) or personal (the loss of a friend or partner) as well as physical. It is important that “personal risk” not be narrowly construed, and that it allow for consideration of the various different ways in which a person can be said to be harmed.

A further question to be answered about this account is what it means for a motivation to be *easily* defeated by considerations of personal risk. Plausibly, this will be a matter of the agent’s motivation being defeated despite being confronted with a level of risk that is below some relevant threshold. There are two issues relating to this threshold on which different theorists may be inclined to disagree. The first involves the question of where to set the threshold of risk below which a motivation can be rightly thought of as having been defeated easily. The second involves the question of how we ought to determine the level of risk in a given situation. While I will aim to remain open on how best to resolve these particular issues, I do want to say something about the available options.

Regarding the first issue, it is plausible that an agent should not be criticised in terms of their courage if the risk that they face is overwhelming. To borrow a vivid example from Julia Driver, we can imagine the motivation of an agent who had “resisted Nazi torturers for weeks, who had body parts removed, skin peeled away, but who finally

succumbed when driven to the edge of madness by the threat of being eaten by rats.”<sup>24</sup> As Driver is surely correct to claim, this agent can clearly be considered courageous even if their motivation (say, not to provide any information to their interrogators) has been ultimately defeated. On the other hand, some examples do encourage us to question the courage of those involved. If a parent’s motivation to buy vital supplies for their child is defeated by the slight risk of embarrassment were they to mispronounce the necessary product then we would rightly judge them to be lacking in courage. These two contrasting examples suggest the extremes between which the proper threshold ought to be set. Of course, competing theorists may wish to set the threshold at different levels within these extremes, or to set the threshold at different levels depending on the situation.<sup>25</sup> I will not attempt to resolve this issue here, and will instead aim to focus on examples likely to gain widespread acceptance as being either clearly courageous or clearly non-courageous.

In addition to the issue of what the appropriate threshold level of risk ought to be, there is also the issue of how we should measure the level of risk in a given situation. For example, it will make a significant difference whether we evaluate the defeasibility of a motivation by considering the *actual* level of risk or by considering the level of risk *as perceived by the agent*. The first approach would be to consider objective risk while the second would be to consider (purely) subjective risk. Of these two extremes, there would appear to be good reason to favour the subjective approach over the objective approach. This would allow us to explain why it can be courageous to take the crucial penalty in a football match even when the objective risk of failure has been greatly lowered (because the opposing goalkeeper has been bribed) or why the torture victim in Driver’s example would still be courageous even if the interrogators were unlikely to be able to carry out their threat (because they would have difficulty in procuring the necessary rats). To use a more outlandish example, it explains why the crew of *Star Trek* might be courageous while tackling a foe in the holodeck, even when the safety settings are operating within normal parameters. On the other hand, there are cases which encourage us to move away from the purely subjective approach – cases where the

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<sup>24</sup> Driver (2001) p. 73

<sup>25</sup> One option would be to vary the threshold depending on the strength of the agent’s motivation or depending on whatever strength of motivation would be justified.

agent's risk assessment is especially foolish or irrational. This suggests that some middle-ground between the extremes is required. Perhaps we should evaluate based on the level of risk that it would be rational for the agent to believe was present, or the level of risk that would be supported by the available evidence. The account as I present it here, and the subsequent explanation for the relationship between courage and moral virtue, is compatible with different answers to this question and so I will not further discuss these issues. The aim here has been to better explain what is being meant by "easily defeated" in the basic understanding of courage being proposed. This is a matter of there being some level of risk (however measured) below which it would be problematic for an agent's motivation to be defeated. If the agent's motivation remains (or would remain) undefeated at any level of risk up to that point, then we ought to say that their motivation is not *easily* defeated by considerations of personal risk and that, therefore, they may possess the relevant form of courage.

With these clarifications in mind, we can now turn our attention back to the understanding of courage that is being suggested. The suggestion is that forms of courage (regarding a particular context or end) involve motivations that are not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. This understanding is in-keeping with many commonly held intuitions regarding the nature of courage. For example, it is commonly remarked that the ways in which an agent can demonstrate courage are numerous and highly variable. When asked to imagine a case in which someone might act courageously, some will imagine a soldier on the battlefield, or perhaps an outlaw in the Wild West. Others will think of examples from history of those who took a stand in order to further some just cause – examples such as Rosa Parks. And, on reflection, most would surely accept that courage can be shown by a patient suffering through some chronic illness, or by a shy student who speaks up in class. While it is not immediately obvious what these examples have in common, a plausible understanding of courage will allow that courage can be expressed in (at least) these varying contexts and in these various ways.<sup>26</sup> An account of courage as involving a non-defeasible

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<sup>26</sup> This variety explains Socrates' plea when saying: "I wanted to learn from you not only what constitutes courage for the hoplite but for a horseman as well and for every sort of warrior. And I wanted to include not only those who are courageous in warfare but also those who are brave in

motivation is perfectly able to uphold this intuition. When we evaluate the soldier as being courageous, we do so on the grounds that their motivation to achieve their set goals or to serve their country is not being defeated by the very real danger that confronts them. When we judge that Rosa Parks was courageous, we do so because her motivation to support the cause of civil rights was not defeated by the risk of arrest, abuse or mistreatment which she knew to be a likely consequence of her actions. And when we judge the patient suffering through a chronic illness to be courageous, this is because their motivation to live as normal a life as possible, or to live life in a certain way (for example cheerfully, or with dignity), is not defeated by the increased difficulties and dangers that they face. The proposed account can explain why these agents clearly possess forms of courage. And in these cases the known levels of risk are so high that it makes sense for us to assume that such agents will in fact be exemplars of overall courage. Compatibility with these intuitions about courage provides us with reason to accept the understanding of courage that is being suggested.

Having clarified certain aspects of the proposed account of courage, as well as providing *prima facie* reason for its acceptance, it is now possible to consider the relationship between courage and the moral virtues that it would suggest. According to the motivations model, moral virtues consist of a motivation towards some characteristic end. For example, a virtuously kind agent will be motivated towards the end of protecting and promoting well-being. However, as was explained in the previous chapter, not just any motivation towards the characteristic end will be sufficient. First of all, a virtuous motivation must be sufficiently *persistent*. We do not think of the virtuously kind agent as one whose motivation to promote well-being is fleeting or sporadic. Similarly, the motivation must not be so weak that, even if persistent, it would never be strong enough to actually prompt the agent into action. That is, the virtuous motivation must be sufficiently *strongly felt*. And finally, the motivation involved in a moral virtue must be sufficiently *robust* in the sense that it will not be easily overridden by competing considerations. For example, if an agent possesses a persistent and strongly felt motivation to promote well-being, but their motivation is always overridden by the competing aim of making as much money as possible, then we will not want to say that

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dangers at sea, and the ones who show courage in illness and poverty and affairs of state” in Plato (trans. Sprague) (1997) p. 676 [191d].



the motivation for well-being is sufficient for virtue. It is only when sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness are achieved that we can say that an agent possesses the type of motivation necessary for a moral virtue. I have suggested that we can refer to a motivation that meets the sufficient levels of persistence, strength and robustness as a *deep* motivation.

Moral virtues, then, involve a deep motivation towards some characteristic end, and having a deep motivation involves (among other things) having a motivation that is robust in the face of competing considerations. One type of competing consideration for a morally virtuous motivation will be considerations of personal risk. For example, the virtuously kind agent will have a motivation to protect and promote well-being that is (among other things) not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. The virtuously compassionate agent will have a motivation to alleviate suffering that is (among other things) not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. If an agent's otherwise virtuous motivation is easily defeated by considerations of personal risk then they do not possess the relevant moral virtue. And, of course, I have suggested that a motivation towards some end which is *not* easily defeated by considerations of personal risk is exactly what an agent who is courageous regarding that end will possess. Therefore, possession of a given moral virtue will involve possession of what is required for the form of courage relating to the characteristic end of that virtue. The virtuously kind agent will be courageous regarding the end of protecting and promoting well-being. The virtuously compassionate agent will be courageous regarding the end of alleviating suffering. In this way, we can begin to understand the proper relationship between courage and the moral virtues.

Courage can be best understood as an *enabler* for moral virtue. More accurately, those forms of courage which relate to the end of a moral virtue can be best understood as being enablers for the corresponding virtue. An example may help to further explain this relationship. Consider again the example of a parent who feels strongly motivated to secure vital supplies for their young child but who fails to do so due to a fear of ridicule were they to mispronounce the necessary product. Clearly there is something problematic about the character of such an agent. One way of understanding the

problem is to interpret the case as one where the agent does possess kindness but is still morally lacking as the result of failing to possess the independent virtue of courage. However, we ought instead to recognise that the virtue of kindness is actually missing in this case – and for the very reason that the agent lacks the relevant form of courage. Their motivation to protect and promote well-being, despite being strongly felt, has been easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. This tells us that their motivation is not sufficiently robust and so is not sufficient for morally virtuous kindness. If we could transform the agent such that they did possess courage regarding the end of promoting well-being then we could improve their moral character – not because the added courage is an independent moral virtue but because by adding that form of courage we would make it possible for the agent to actually possess the virtue of kindness. This does mean that an agent cannot be morally virtuous without possessing (relevant forms of) courage, and this fact explains why many have assumed that courage itself must be a moral virtue. However, it is instead the case that the addition of (relevant forms of) courage makes the possession of actual moral virtues possible, and it is the addition of these virtues that makes for a morally virtuous agent.

The understanding of courage as enabling the possession of moral virtue (as opposed to being an independent moral virtue) can explain some of the issues raised by the problems discussed above. For example, the value problem suggested that there can be cases where an individual possesses courage but where this possession is lacking in moral worth. We are now in a better position to understand why this is the case. We have seen that there are different forms of courage (regarding different contexts or ends) and that possessing one form is no guarantee of possessing any of the other forms. Some forms of courage will relate to an end which is also the end of a moral virtue. When this is the case, the agent who possesses that form of courage will possess something that is necessary for possession of the corresponding moral virtue – they will possess a motivation towards the virtuous end that is not easily defeated by considerations of personal risk. In this way, they will be closer to possessing the moral virtue than someone who lacks that form of courage, and so will be closer to the moral ideal. This

explains the moral worth of possessing these forms of courage.<sup>27</sup> However, the same is not true for someone who possesses a form of courage regarding an end that is unrelated to any moral virtue. In some cases that form of courage will be morally neutral, such as the form involving a non-defeasible motivation to secure a cup of tea. In other cases, the form of courage may actually be a moral hindrance – such as those cases where the related end runs contrary to a moral virtue. Cases such as the courageous murderer described by Foot (or the courageous terrorist or super-villain) will likely fit this description. In these cases, the courage that is possessed will be of no moral worth, and we might even think that the moral character of the agent would be improved if these forms of courage were not present. The understanding of courage as an enabler, as opposed to an independent moral virtue, provides us with a satisfying explanation for the respective levels of moral worth present in these examples.

The understanding of courage as an enabler is therefore able to provide those explanations that are required if we choose to deny the virtue status of courage. It can explain the connection between courage and the moral virtues in a way that maintains the moral value of (certain forms of) courage. It can also explain the widespread assumption that courage is an independent moral virtue. On the enabler account it is correct to say that an agent entirely lacking in courage will also be lacking in moral virtue, and this explains the assumption that courage itself must be a moral virtue. However, the proper explanation for this is that the absence of (relevant forms of) courage will prevent an agent from possessing further traits, such as kindness and compassion, which are actually moral virtues. In addition, the enabler account is in-keeping with many intuitions regarding courage, such as the belief that courage can be displayed in many different ways and in many different contexts, and the belief that the courage of a soldier ought not to be entirely determined by what side of the battlefield they happen to be on. The enabler account therefore provides an attractive understanding of courage, and of the relationship between courage and the moral virtues, for those who would deny that courage is a moral virtue.

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<sup>27</sup> This is similar to how Zagzebski understands the moral value of *all* courage and reveals the partial truth in Zagzebski's suggestion.

The motivations model of the moral virtues faces a challenge in accommodating courage as a moral virtue. This is because we have reason to doubt that the motivational structure of courage is similar to that of other candidate virtues such as kindness or compassion. The value problem also suggests a difference in the moral worth of courage when compared to other candidate moral virtues. By providing a plausible account of courage as a non-virtue, it has been possible to show that denying the virtue status of courage is a viable option when defending an account of the nature of the moral virtues. Before concluding this chapter, I want to briefly mention other traits which might be thought to pose a problem for the motivations model (and for other accounts of the virtues) and to explain the various options that are available when responding to these traits.

## **5. OTHER PROBLEMATIC TRAITS**

In this chapter I have so far focused solely on the trait of courage. This trait is of particular interest due to the widespread acceptance of its virtue status, as well as the extent to which its problematic nature has already been touched upon in the literature. However, it is important to recognise that courage is not the only trait that can be used to challenge accounts of the moral virtues. When presented with an account of the nature of the virtues, one response to that account will always be to suggest some candidate virtue that the account is unable to accommodate. We saw in Chapter Two that Julia Driver has highlighted the trait of modesty (along with the other virtues of ignorance) in an attempt to undermine rival accounts of the virtues.<sup>28</sup> In response to such suggestions, the defender of a particular account will have the option of either claiming that the proposed candidate virtue actually can be accommodated by their account, or else arguing that the trait is not in fact a moral virtue. I am interested here in defending the motivations model of the moral virtues. With regards to courage, I have suggested that it will be acceptable for a defender of that account to select the option whereby they deny the virtue status of courage. And I have attempted to lessen any costs in embracing that option by providing an account of courage as a non-virtue which, I have argued, is independently plausible. I now want to briefly suggest that the strategy

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<sup>28</sup> See Section 2 of Chapter Two (and the references included there) for more on this topic.

used in response to the trait of courage may also be useful in responding to other problematic traits.

As mentioned above, one supporter of a pluralist understanding of the moral virtues is Robert Adams. Adams believes that different virtues can be of different types, and suggests that two different types of virtue are the *motivational* virtues and the *structural* virtues.<sup>29</sup> Adams is not alone in suggesting such a distinction between types of virtue. For example, in ‘Will Power and the Virtues’, Robert Roberts proposes a distinction between “substantive” or “motivational” virtues on the one hand, and “virtues of will power” on the other.<sup>30</sup> These theorists are in agreement that the trait of courage must be placed in a separate category from traits such as compassion or honesty or justice. However, courage is not the only trait that is to be so distinguished. One important example of another trait that is distinguished from candidate virtues such as compassion and honesty is the trait of temperance. Much like the trait of courage, the trait of temperance (or self-control) has been widely accepted as a moral virtue. And, also like the trait of courage, we might worry that it is difficult to identify a characteristic end that will be common to all instances of temperance. Given this, it will be interesting to consider whether or not the enabler account that was used in response to the trait of courage can also be used in response to the trait of temperance.

The motivations model states that moral virtues consist in deep motivations towards characteristic ends, and a deep motivation is one that is sufficiently persistent, strongly felt, and robust. This requires (among other things) that the motivation not be easily overridden or defeated by competing considerations. One type of competing consideration will be considerations stemming from personal risk, and the possession of courage enables an agent to possess motivations that are not (easily) defeated by such considerations. But other types of consideration may also defeat an agent’s otherwise virtuous motivation. An agent’s strong motivation to promote well-being, for example, may be steadfast in the face of personal risk and yet be utterly defeated by a competing desire to make as much money as possible, or to experience the pleasures of alcohol or

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that Adams does not think that these categories will be exhaustive of all the different types of virtue. See Adams (2006) Ch.2, Section 4 (esp. pp. 33–34).

<sup>30</sup> Roberts (1984)

idleness. An agent in possession of (the relevant forms of) temperance will not have their motivations overridden in this way.<sup>31</sup> The role that courage plays when enabling virtue through the avoidance of motivational defeat by consideration of personal risk is played by temperance when enabling virtue through the avoidance of motivational defeat by other considerations, such as considerations of available pleasure. Indeed, I find it plausible to view temperance as a general term for when an agent's motivations are invulnerable to competing considerations, while courage refers specifically to when motivations are invulnerable with regards to considerations of personal risk. But it is not necessary to accept this further claim about the relationship between courage and temperance. All that is required here is to note that the trait of temperance can be treated in the same way as the trait of courage. It is possible to come up with a plausible account of temperance as a non-virtue by accepting that temperance actually serves as an enabler for moral virtue. And the required explanations for why temperance has been thought to be a moral virtue, or for what the actual relationship is between temperance and moral virtue, will be just the same as for courage. The trait of temperance poses no additional problems for the motivations model.

Of course, courage and temperance are only two examples of traits that might be taken to pose a problem for the motivations model. When distinguishing different types of virtue, both Adams and Roberts classify traits such as patience, perseverance, wisdom, and conscientiousness, alongside the traits of courage and temperance. This suggests that the motivations model will have to say something about these traits as well. However, the available options for responding to these traits ought to now be clear. On some occasions the correct response may be to argue that the relevant trait can be accommodated as a moral virtue by the motivations model, and this will involve identifying the characteristic end of such traits. On other occasions the correct response may be to deny that the relevant trait is a moral virtue, and this could be done in a variety of ways. For some traits it may be appropriate to claim that they are virtues of some other type (for example, intellectual or aesthetic virtues), while for others it may be appropriate to argue that they are unconnected with virtue in any way. And on still other

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<sup>31</sup> This view is actually similar to Roberts' position when supporting the idea that (what he calls) the virtues of will power can act as a "preservative" for other traits, although Roberts maintains that these preservatives ought still to be regarded as moral virtues. See Roberts (1984) p. 232.

occasions it may be appropriate to argue that the proposed trait is in fact an enabler for moral virtue, in the same way as I have argued in the cases of courage and temperance. It is not necessary to go through every potentially problematic trait in order to identify which of these possible responses would be most appropriate for that trait. It is instead sufficient to highlight the various options that are available when responding to objections of this sort. Given the availability of these options, the motivations model looks to be well-placed in terms of being able to respond to the suggestion of potentially problematic candidate virtues.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

All accounts of the nature of the moral virtues will face challenges in accommodating certain problematic candidate virtues. Courage is a prime example of such a problematic trait. In this chapter I have explained why courage may be taken to pose a problem for the motivations model (as well as for other accounts of the moral virtues). I have then proposed and defended an alternative account of courage as a non-virtue on which courage is instead understood to be an enabler for moral virtue. The arguments in this chapter show that the motivations model is capable of responding to challenges involving potentially problematic candidate virtues. In addition to providing a plausible account of a key candidate moral virtue, this discussion also provides further support for the claim that the motivations model is a strong contender within virtue theory.

## CHAPTER FIVE: IDENTIFYING THE MORAL VIRTUES

### 0. INTRODUCTION

My focus so far has been on evaluating three different accounts of the *nature* of the moral virtues. I have argued in defence of the motivations model, on which a moral virtue consists of a deep motivation towards some characteristic end. Of course, not all deep motivations will be plausible contenders for virtue status. The deep motivation to secure as much money as possible is not a plausible candidate moral virtue. Therefore, anyone who accepts the motivations model will have an interest in identifying which motivations actually are moral virtues. In fact, addressing this type of issue will be an obvious next step regardless of the model of the nature of moral virtues that one endorses. If we think that virtues are skills, or that virtues are composites, or even if we think that virtues can have any number of different natures, it will still be important to ask which sub-set of these ought to be accepted as moral virtues. Determining the *identity* of the moral virtues is therefore one of the more pressing tasks facing anyone working on virtue theory. My aim in this chapter is to evaluate different ways of carrying out this important task.

The chapter will begin by considering an approach to identifying the moral virtues endorsed most clearly in the work of Michael Slote. Slote argues that attempts to explain virtue status in terms of some other concept or feature of the world are mistaken. Instead, the value and virtuousness of a given trait is a basic feature of that trait, and ought not to be explained with reference to other factors. As we shall see, this approach faces certain challenges. Given this, Sections 2 and 3 will move on to evaluate two of the most influential alternative approaches to identifying the moral virtues – Julia Driver’s consequentialist approach and Rosalind Hursthouse’s neo-Aristotelian approach. I will justify a re-assessment of the fundamental value approach by arguing that these rival approaches face serious problems.<sup>1</sup> The chapter ends by re-considering the fundamental value approach and by suggesting a possible way forward on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of some of the worries discussed in this chapter appeared in my Masters dissertation, submitted at the University of Glasgow in 2011.



## 1. SLOTE'S FUNDAMENTAL VALUE APPROACH

Michael Slote is perhaps best known for endorsing a form of what he calls “agent-based” virtue ethics.<sup>2</sup> The particular form of agent-basing that Slote endorses tells us that the moral status of actions is entirely determined by whether or not they “exhibit or express” a positive (overall) motivation on the part of the agent.<sup>3</sup> This account has been extensively commented upon and criticised in the literature.<sup>4</sup> However, my interest here is not in Slote’s theory of morally right action. Instead, I want to point out a second important element of Slote’s agent-based approach to the virtues. The two elements of the general agent-based approach can be set out as follows:

*Agent-Priority:* The moral status of actions is derivative from ethical facts about the “motives, dispositions, or inner life of moral individuals”.

*Fundamental Value:* Ethical facts about the motives, dispositions, or inner life of moral individuals are *fundamental*.<sup>5</sup>

With this definition of the agent-based approach in mind, Slote rules out Aristotle as a possible adherent of the view. The Aristotelian approach may count as “agent-prior” because right action is determined with reference to virtue concepts (and is thus a form of virtue ethics), but it does not understand ethical facts about motives to be fundamental, explaining these instead in terms of the further concept of *eudaimonia* (or a flourishing life).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, David Hume is ruled out as a possible historical supporter of agent-basing. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume asserts that “all virtuous actions derive their merit only from virtuous motives”, and Slote points out that this may mean that Hume accepts agent-priority.<sup>7</sup> However, Hume also accepts that the virtuousness of motives is to some extent connected to their positive consequences, and so he fails to

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<sup>2</sup> Especially in Slote (2001) and Slote (1995). See also the contributions from Slote in Baron, Pettit and Slote (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Slote (2001) Chapter 1

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Russell (2009) section 3.3, Copp and Sobel (2004), and the contributions from Marcia Baron and Philip Pettit in Baron, Pettit and Slote (1997).

<sup>5</sup> Slote (2001) pp. 6–8

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (Slote’s assessment of Aristotle is based upon the interpretation offered in Hursthouse (1991). On other interpretations, Slote believes that Aristotle may fail to endorse *either* element of the agent-based approach.)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 8 (The quote from Hume is taken from *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3, Part Two, Section One. This is reprinted in, for example, Hume (2011), with the relevant quote appearing on p. 415.)

endorse both of the necessary components of agent-basing.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Slote admits that it is difficult to find *any* obvious prior adherents to the kind of agent-based approach that he proposes.<sup>9</sup>

While accepting that it is most common to refer to Slote's overall view as "agent-based", I will here be referring to his "fundamental value" approach to the virtues. This move is necessary in order to avoid confusion about the focus of this chapter. I will not be considering Slote's account of morally right action (the "agent-prior" component of agent-basing) and will only be interested in his claims regarding the fundamentality of ethical facts about inner traits (the "fundamental value" component of agent-basing).<sup>10</sup> I ought, therefore, to say more about this aspect of Slote's account.

When faced with the task of identifying the moral virtues, it is understandable that we might want to do this with reference to some further concept. As we shall see, influential approaches include identifying the moral virtues with reference to the production of positive consequences, or with reference to the idea of the good life for human beings. However, not everyone agrees that such appeal to a further concept is required. Work on virtue theory often begins by providing a list of the kinds of traits that we have in mind when talking about virtues. Regular mention tends to be given to traits such as compassion, honesty, courage, justice, temperance, and so on, and the listing of these traits is fairly widespread and accepted by (most) virtue theorists.<sup>11</sup> Instead of looking for some further explanation that can tell us why these traits are moral virtues, we ought instead to notice just how widely accepted their virtue status is. Perhaps this tells us something about their value independently of any further considerations. Perhaps it suggests that we can simply *see* that these traits are valuable in a fundamental way.

This is the approach to identifying the moral virtues that is taken by Slote. When assessing the value of particular traits, Slote denies that we need to consult other concepts or ideas. For example, when discussing the prospects of basing a moral theory

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 3–10 and p. 210 (However, a contemporary example is provided by Linda Zagzebski's treatment of the intellectual virtues. See Zagzebski (1996) Part II, Section 4.2.2.)

<sup>10</sup> Michael Brady instead refers to Slote's view as a "direct" theory of the virtues (in Brady (2005)).

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche famously provides a quite different account of the virtues, as discussed by Philippa Foot in *Natural Goodness* (2001) Chapter 7.

on either universal benevolence or a more partialistic form of caring, Slote defends these traits as plausible contenders by saying that “the moral goodness of (universal) benevolence or of caring about people is intuitively obvious and in need of no further moral grounding.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, when discussing the possible virtue of “inner strength”, Slote suggests that “there is something intuitively admirable about being strong inside, something requiring no appeal to or defence from *other* ideas”.<sup>13</sup> Rather than coming up with some alternative method for answering our key question, we ought instead to simply reflect upon the nature of the traits themselves. We will then come to realise that some traits are fundamentally valuable and (therefore) virtuous. This idea is also endorsed by Linda Zagzebski, as can be shown by the following lengthy quote:

I believe it is possible that we can see the goodness of a person in this rather direct way. She may simply exude a “glow” of nobility or fineness of character... If we then attempt to find out what it is about such a person that makes him good, we may be able to identify that goodness as involving certain feelings or motivations such as feelings of compassion or of self-respect or of respect for others, or motives of benevolence, sympathy, or love... In each case we would not determine that his love, compassion, or benevolence is good because of its relation to anything independently identified as good. We would simply see that these feelings or motivations are the states whose goodness we see in him.<sup>14</sup>

The quotes from both Slote and Zagzebski show that influential virtue theorists have endorsed the idea that the virtuousness of traits ought not to be explained by reference to further, more fundamentally valuable, concepts.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this leaves open the possibility that a connection to, for example, positive consequences or a good life might provide evidence for the virtuousness of a given trait. But that evidence will be defeasible, and it would be a mistake to assume that the connection is what explains the value of the trait. Instead, certain traits are fundamentally valuable and these are the traits that are the virtues.

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<sup>12</sup> Slote (2001) p. 38

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>14</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 83

<sup>15</sup> A further example of a theorist who accepts the basic value of virtuous traits may be provided by J. L. A. Garcia (1990).

In terms of providing a method for identifying the moral virtues, the fundamental value approach suggests that this ought not to be done by relying on a necessary connection between virtuous character traits and some further concept, such as the good life. Instead, both Slote and Zagzebski discuss the possibility that we can simply “see” that certain traits are fundamentally valuable, or that the value of certain traits will be “intuitively obvious”. This suggests that, on the fundamental value approach, it will be necessary to identify the moral virtues via an appeal to our intuitions. I now want to explain why we might be uneasy about endorsing this approach.

The most important, and perhaps the most obvious, point that needs to be made regarding any appeal to intuitions is the following: intuitions differ. Intuitions can differ between different people at the same time, different people at different times, and even the same person at different times. It may even be possible for an individual to experience conflicting intuitions at any one time. It is plausible that these differences will be influenced by societal factors and cultural backgrounds. Moral intuitions regarding duties of care to those in need can be expected to differ between those struggling in poverty-stricken countries and those who live in relatively secure and affluent surroundings. The intuitions of a philosopher in Ancient Greece can be expected to be different from those of a philosopher today.<sup>16</sup> Such disagreement leaves us with a problem when identifying the moral virtues by appeal to their fundamental value. If the value of virtuous traits is meant to be “intuitively obvious” then how can we explain instances of disagreement, and how are we supposed to uncover which intuitions are the correct ones? Of course, we could say that *all* intuitions are correct for the person who experiences them. This would lead to an extremely relativistic account whereby any trait (including cruelty, prejudice, or arrogance) could end up being classed as a moral virtue, as long as its possessor has the necessary corresponding intuitions. It would also be possible for traits to frequently lose and then re-acquire their virtue status whenever an individual’s intuitions fluctuated. Assuming that we would prefer to avoid such conclusions, the fundamental value approach appears to put us in the position of having to come up with some way of resolving disagreements. We need to be able to determine which intuitions regarding the virtue status of traits are the correct ones.

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Slote’s own fundamental virtue of caring does not appear among Plato’s list of cardinal virtues.

This issue cannot be resolved by relying on intuitions about which intuitions we ought to accept. That approach would be likely to lead to something of a vicious regress. Second-order intuitions (intuitions about which intuitions are correct) are just as likely to differ as are first-order intuitions. If someone finds it intuitive that faith and piety are key moral virtues, then we should not expect them to simply discard this belief upon being told that others disagree. Instead, they are likely to have the further, second-order intuition that their opponent's first-order intuitions are incorrect. And this problem of disagreement will not be solved by appeal to a third, fourth, or any higher level of intuition. Furthermore, giving priority to our own intuitions makes it likely that our list of moral virtues will simply reflect our own cultural background. Therefore, it looks as if we need to appeal to some further concept in order to adjudicate in those instances where we disagree over the virtuousness of a given trait. This is an objection to Slote that has been raised by Daniel Russell, who argues that:

To avoid parochialism, one must look *somewhere* to explain why one trait is virtuous or admirable while another is not, but of course to give any other explanation is to concede that aretaic concepts are not fundamental.<sup>17</sup>

The challenge facing the fundamental value approach to identifying the moral virtues ought to now be clear. If we do not explain the virtuousness of traits by reference to some further concept then it looks as if we will have no way of adjudicating disputes regarding which traits actually are virtues. We will instead be left with only our intuitions to help us in deciding which traits to accept, and these intuitions can be expected to have been shaped by our upbringing and environment in ways that may render our list of virtues problematically parochial.

These worries provide a challenge for the fundamental value approach, and they ought to encourage us to consider alternative methods which *do* look elsewhere for an explanation of why one trait is virtuous while another is not. I want to now consider two of the most influential approaches of this type – Driver's consequentialist approach and Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian approach. However, I will be returning to the

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<sup>17</sup> Russell (2009) p. 92

fundamental value approach later in this chapter. A re-assessment of that approach can be justified by first arguing that the methods proposed by Driver and Hursthouse face serious problems of their own.

## 2. DRIVER'S CONSEQUENTIALIST APPROACH

Following the revival of interest in the virtues over the past few decades, most work within the field has drawn its primary inspiration from the ideas of Aristotle. That is, most virtue theorists have produced accounts of the virtues (and of virtuous action) that are influenced by and in-keeping with Aristotelian conceptions of the virtuous life.<sup>18</sup> Julia Driver provides a radical departure from this general tendency by instead presenting an account of the virtues that is consequentialist in nature. Instead of appeals to concepts such as *eudaimonia* or *phronesis*, we are encouraged to think about the role of virtues in the production of positive outcomes. I will set out Driver's method for identifying the moral virtues before highlighting some problems that arise for the consequentialist approach. I will argue that these problems provide sufficient reason for us to instead consider an alternative approach.

### 2.1 EXPLAINING DRIVER'S CONSEQUENTIALIST APPROACH

Driver presents her consequentialist account of the virtues in Chapter 4 of *Uneasy Virtue*.<sup>19</sup> The general idea is set out in the following way:

Specifically, the account that I want to propose is an *objective consequentialist* account of the virtues, which would define moral virtues as character traits that systematically produce more actual good than not.<sup>20</sup>

On such a view, traits like generosity, kindness, justice, and courage will count as moral virtues if and because they systematically produce more actual good than not. The use of *systematically* in this account is important in order to avoid certain unintuitive conclusions. Consider the case of a super-villain who cruelly mocks the seemingly defeated hero. If the cruel taunts ultimately spur the hero on to re-double her efforts and save the day, then the villain's trait of cruelty, in this instance, will have resulted in a positive outcome.

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<sup>18</sup> See Annas (2003) and Hursthouse (2006) p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Driver (2001)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 68

A simple consequentialist account would then be forced to accept that the trait of cruelty was a moral virtue in this instance. Driver is well aware of such dangers, and uses the idea of the *systematic* consequences of a trait in order to avoid them. On Driver's view, we will not have to include cruelty as a moral virtue unless it "normally", "by and large", or "generally" leads to the production of good.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it is not the case that we are to consider the systematic effects of a trait as held by a particular individual. Even if the cruel villain was utterly inept such that their cruel intentions *always* resulted in unintended positive outcomes, this would not mean that cruelty systematically produces good in the sense that is meant by Driver. As well as not focusing on specific instances of a trait in action, we are also to avoid focusing on the impact at the level of particular agents. Instead, we ought to evaluate traits by considering their general impact within the society as a whole. As Driver explains:

The account that I'm pushing for in this book focuses on the production of good within a population, and not simply with respect to an individual. This seems intuitively plausible to me.<sup>22</sup>

We need not accept that the inept villain's cruelty is a moral virtue because cruelty will not lead systematically to the production of good within the population more generally. A trait can be a virtue even if its possession by a particular individual never leads to the production of any good consequences, and even if it actually leads to bad consequences in certain unlucky cases. So long as the trait does systematically lead to good outcomes in the general population then we can class it as being a genuine virtue. Driver provides a useful analogy in order to make this point clear:

Consider an analogy with an artefact that we feel to be good. A sprinkler system in a building may well be good and useful even if – because that building may never catch fire – it never gets turned on. It's a good thing to have because if there were a fire, it would save the contents of the building. And sprinkler systems in general are good and useful, though on occasion they can lead to disasters, for example, where the system is used in a building storing chemicals that explode on contact with water.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 67

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Footnote 6 in Chapter 4 (printed on p. 120)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 75

These quotes and examples from Driver ought to be enough to make clear the general consequentialist approach to identifying virtues. But there is one final clarification that is required. In the (first) above quote from Driver, moral virtues are linked to the systematic production of good in general. However, in a subsequent paper, Driver suggests that we need to understand “good” in a particular way if we are seeking to distinguish the *moral* virtues. Traits that are moral virtues are to be distinguished by the production of a particular type of good (and by who the good is produced for):

Moral virtues produce benefits to others – in particular, they promote the well-being of others – while the intellectual virtues produce epistemic good for the agent.<sup>24</sup>

With this further clarification in mind, we ought to now have a clear understanding of Driver’s consequentialist approach to identifying moral virtues. A trait can be classed as a moral virtue when it systematically leads to the production of more good (understood in terms of the well-being of others) than bad in the general population. I will now highlight some problems for this account.

## 2.2 PROBLEMS FOR THE CONSEQUENTIALIST APPROACH

I will now argue that the consequentialist approach to identifying moral virtues faces serious challenges. The underlying problem here will be that the virtuousness of a trait, on the consequentialist approach, is independent of the actual features or nature of the trait itself. Instead, virtuousness is determined by external consequences. This underlying aspect of the consequentialist approach leads to two general worries. Firstly, we ought to be concerned by the potential for the production of an unintuitive list of moral virtues (either through the endorsement of traits that are intuitively *unappealing* or through the endorsement of traits that are intuitively *banal*). Secondly, the approach appears to allow for a problematic degree of relativism when determining virtue status. I will now explain these two worries.

One way in which Driver’s approach leads to strongly unintuitive conclusions is through the endorsement of intuitively unappealing traits as being moral virtues. And one

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<sup>24</sup> Driver (2003) p. 381



example of this is actually provided by Driver. Driver asks us to imagine a society that has developed differently from normal human society and is populated by a race of “Mutors”. The example is fleshed out in the following way:

It happens to be the case that for them, beating one’s child severely when it is exactly 5.57 years old actually increases the life expectancy of the child by 50 percent. The child is upset by the beating, but this feeling goes away in time... So some Mutors have a special trait – they intensely desire to beat children who are exactly 5.57 years old. That it is good for the child is irrelevant to them.<sup>25</sup>

Using the consequentialist method, a Mutor’s intense desire to beat children will be classed as a moral virtue because being beaten happens to (systematically) lead to a longer life for the child. This result is generated even though the benefit to the child plays no role in explaining *why* the Mutor wants to carry out the beating. In fact, the same result would be generated even if the beating did not benefit the child, so long as it did (systematically) benefit some third-party to a greater extent than it harmed the child. If this is the case, the intense desire to beat children will be classed as a moral virtue – as an “excellence of character” – on Driver’s consequentialist approach.<sup>26</sup>

This example may be enough on its own to lead us to question the consequentialist approach. Commentators, including Slote and John Skorupski, have focused on this case (and cases like it) as providing ample reason to consider alternatives.<sup>27</sup> And Driver, when discussing the results generated by the Mutor example, admits that “I myself am not comfortable at all with this case”.<sup>28</sup> However, perhaps the Mutor example alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that the consequentialist approach is problematic. There are aspects of the case which weaken its force as a counter-example. Driver has pointed out that the Mutor example is one of pure science-fiction, involving “alien beings” that are “wired differently and have evolved in different settings”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, we ought not to fully trust our intuitions about this case, or about the similarly science-fictional “Satan

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<sup>25</sup> Driver (2001) p. 55

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 56

<sup>27</sup> Slote (2004); Skorupski (2004)

<sup>28</sup> Driver (2004) p. 40

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp. 40–41

and Planet X” example provided by Skorupski.<sup>30</sup> It will be important to add to the Mutor example in order to demonstrate that it is just one symptom of an underlying problem.

A further example of an intuitively unappealing trait that may be classed as a moral virtue on the consequentialist approach has been provided by Amartya Sen.<sup>31</sup> Sen appeals to the possibility that the wealth of a nation will be positively affected by the presence of citizens who are robustly focused on maximising their own profits. In order to become wealthy themselves, such individuals will need to employ other people. And, if they are successful, this will have the effect of increasing the money that a government receives through taxes. On the plausible assumption that those living in wealthier nations will experience higher living standards, the overall impact of those who are focused on increasing their own profits may actually be a positive one. Considerations of this nature support Sen’s claim that “the motivation of merciless profit maximization” might, on the whole, produce a positive “utility sum”.<sup>32</sup> If so, the motivation to produce profit (or to maximise one’s own profits) will be classed as a moral virtue on the consequentialist approach – regardless of the fact that the benefits that are produced play no role in actually motivating the agent. The motivation for profit maximisation is unlikely to be viewed by many as a strong candidate moral virtue. The failure to rule out this intuitively unappealing trait as being a moral virtue tells against the consequentialist approach.

The consequentialist approach also gets things wrong regarding the character trait possessed by those to whom it is vitally important that others be impressed with them. I have in mind here the character trait that is possessed by, for example, the administrator in an organisation who needs everyone else to see just how important they are in running things efficiently, or by the parent whose desire to be viewed as superior leads them to volunteer at every event taking place at their child’s school. It is not clear what name is appropriate for this trait. Such an individual will not necessarily *believe* that they are important or superior (although they might), and so “self-importance” is not the correct term. The agent is instead deeply motivated, or has a deep need, to have others view them as impressive. Perhaps “need for validation” or “desire for esteem” is the correct term for this trait. But, whatever term we assign to the character trait, it is clear that the

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<sup>30</sup> Skorupski (2004) p. 14

<sup>31</sup> Sen (1979) (This example is also discussed by Slote in Baron, Pettit and Slote (1997) p. 277.)

<sup>32</sup> Sen (1979) p. 468

deep need to be well regarded can be expected to have good overall consequences. The individual with this trait will take on extra responsibilities and tasks which will be helpful to other people. This can be expected to promote the well-being of others, even if that well-being is not truly what is motivating those who possess the trait. The “desire for esteem” will therefore be classed as a moral virtue by the consequentialist approach. And yet, this character trait is not an intuitively appealing trait for someone to possess. The consequentialist approach provides the wrong verdict in this case.

We now have three examples of intuitively unappealing traits that could be classed as moral virtues on the consequentialist approach: the intense desire to beat children, the motivation of merciless profit maximisation, and the desire for esteem. In general, the strategy of identifying intuitively unappealing traits that will be classed as moral virtues is an effective and understandable way of attempting to discredit the consequentialist approach.<sup>33</sup> However, it is important to highlight an equally effective strategy. We should also note that intuitively *banal* traits will be classed as virtues by this account. Consider the deep motivation to ensure that you blink at least eight times per minute. It seems unlikely that this deeply held trait will lead to any negative consequences. And such a motivation may be expected to systematically lead to some positive outcomes. A reduced rate of blinking when reading for an extended period can cause eyes to become dry, and this can lead to a distracting feeling of fatigue for the reader. The motivation to ensure that their rate of blinking stays at a consistently high level will systematically allow an agent to avoid this outcome and so will lead to some good (a reduction in feelings of fatigue) without systematically leading to anything bad. The deep motivation to ensure a high rate of blinking would therefore be classed as a virtue by Driver’s method, even if the good that is produced plays no role in the explanation of why the agent has the motivation in the first place. Consider also the deep motivation to wave at passing trains. This trait may systematically lead to some good (the slight pleasure of passing passengers) without also leading to anything bad. If so, the deep motivation to wave at passing trains will be classed as a moral virtue on the current proposal, even if the slight pleasure of the passengers plays no role in the explanation of why the agent has the trait. And similar arguments could be provided for other seemingly banal traits such as the

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<sup>33</sup> Further problem cases designed to show that externalist approaches to determining virtue status would have unintuitive consequences are provided in Garcia (1990) p. 81.

deep motivation to ensure that every meal features several different colours, or the deep motivation to re-use teabags. Such traits will be classed as virtues even when the good that is systematically produced (the health or environmental benefits) are of no actual concern to the agent. These examples may even be more damaging than the Mutor example mentioned above. The traits involved in the banal examples are closer to real life, and so we have less reason to doubt the intuition that the wrong verdict is being generated. The consequentialist approach can therefore be criticised on the grounds that it would lead to a highly unintuitive list of the moral virtues.

It will not be possible to respond to these problematic examples by appealing to the fact that Driver's account requires traits to *systematically* lead to good outcomes. In the examples that have been provided, there is a systematic connection between the trait and the consequences that are produced. The profit-hungry agents in Sen's example do not care about the well-being that is produced, and may even resent it. However, their motivation for profit does systematically lead to that well-being. They are driven to perform actions (employing people, amassing profit and subsequently paying taxes) that reliably promote the well-being of others. Indeed, by focusing on the general or overall impact of character traits within a society or population, Driver's account allows for these traits to be virtues even when they are possessed by those who do not actually promote well-being. So long as the motivation for profit, or to be esteemed by others, does, on the whole, lead to the promotion of well-being, those who possess such motivations will be classed as virtuous – even if their own desire for profit or for esteem never actually helps anyone.

Furthermore, the demand for a systematic connection between traits and the production of well-being offers no defence against the examples involving intuitively banal character traits. There does appear to be a systematic connection between (for example) being motivated to ensure that every meal includes a variety of colours of food and the positive outcome of the corresponding health benefits. Similarly, there will be a systematic connection between the motivation to wave at passing trains and the slight increase in pleasure (or the reduction in boredom) that is experienced by the passing passengers. And these motivations are unlikely to also lead systematically to any negative outcomes. Therefore, it appears as if these intuitively banal traits ought to be accepted as

systematically leading to good outcomes on the account of “systematically” that is in play. It remains the case that Driver’s account produces an unintuitive list of moral virtues.

The production of an unintuitive list of moral virtues is a serious problem for Driver’s account. However, a second worry also results from the failure to connect virtue status to features that are internal to character traits. This worry concerns the degree of relativity that the approach would allow. We saw above that the consequentialist approach tells us that virtue status depends on the effects of a trait in the wider population (as opposed to in the individual’s own case).<sup>34</sup> This is also explained as encouraging us to focus on the “context” in which the agent is located.<sup>35</sup> However, by tying virtue status to context, we make it possible for an agent to switch from being virtuous to being vicious (and vice versa) simply by changing context. If an agent moves from a society where the effects of their trait are generally negative, to a society where the effects are generally positive, then they can suddenly be classed as highly virtuous. And when the Mutors relocate to the United Kingdom, this may be enough to make vicious agents out of virtuous ones. An agent’s moral status can be switched along with their postcode. Driver suggests that her account is not “a form of pernicious relativism, since the criterion for virtue is universally the same.”<sup>36</sup> However, the extent of the relativism that is present in an approach that makes an agent’s moral status dependent on their location does seem to be problematic. The combination of these worries ought to encourage us to consider alternatives to the consequentialist approach.

It is important to stress the general feature of Driver’s account which leads to the two problems that have been identified here. On Driver’s account, the virtue status of a given trait will be independent of any of the actual internal features of that trait. That is, it is possible for any trait to be classed as a moral virtue, regardless of the actual motivation that the trait involves. All that is required is for the world to be (or to become) such that the trait systematically leads to the production of good outcomes. As Driver says, “It is not the motive that makes the trait a given type of virtue” but rather

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<sup>34</sup> Driver (2001 p. 82) talks of focusing on the effects of traits “within populations or societies”.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the systematic effects of the trait.<sup>37</sup> This means that it is impossible to rule out the possibility that traits which involve motivations that are intuitively unappealing or banal will be classed as moral virtues. If the external situation is right, then any motivation can be a moral virtue on this approach, including the motivation to beat children or the motivation to wave at passing trains. This feature of the account also means that an agent's moral status can change even when no internal change takes place. Because virtue status is determined by external consequences, an agent can cease to be virtuous simply as a result of a change in their external circumstances. The problems that have been identified here provide good reason to consider an alternative approach. In particular, we have good reason to consider an approach that is less susceptible to these objections.

### 3. HURSTHOUSE'S NEO-ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH

I am attempting to justify a re-assessment of the fundamental value approach to identifying the moral virtues by highlighting problems for two influential rival accounts. I have shown that the consequentialist approach suffers as a result of failing to connect virtue status to features that are internal to the trait itself. An Aristotelian approach to the virtues, however, will demand that the virtues involve certain motivations and emotions.<sup>38</sup> I will now explain Rosalind Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian approach to this issue, and argue that this approach faces serious problems. These problems will provide us with good reason to abandon Hursthouse's approach.

#### 3.1 EXPLAINING HURSTHOUSE'S NEO-ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH

In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tells us that the good life for human beings consists in a life of *eudaimonia*, and that this can be achieved by those who well fulfil the function that is common to all (rational) human beings.<sup>39</sup> To fulfil our function well is to be a good example of a human being, in the same way that a knife that fulfils the function of cutting is a good example of a knife. In order to fulfil our function, and so to achieve a

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<sup>37</sup> Driver (2003) p. 374

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Hursthouse (1999) Introduction (esp. pp. 11–13).

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) [Book I, Chapter 7]

*eudaimon* life, it is important that we live a life in accordance with virtue.<sup>40</sup> In *On Virtue Ethics*, Hursthouse builds upon this Aristotelian insight regarding the connection between living well and living a good human life, as well as upon ideas taken from Plato and from Philippa Foot.<sup>41</sup> In particular, Hursthouse is interested in the idea that the possession of moral virtues is what makes an agent good *qua* human being (or a good example of a human being) and that, therefore, we can come to identify the moral virtues by reflecting upon what it means to be good *qua* human being. In order to clearly explain this approach, it will be useful to set out three central features:

*Plato's Requirement:* The virtues make their possessor good *qua* human being.<sup>42</sup>

*Good as Attributive:* 'Good' is an attributive adjective in the sense that the criteria for goodness in a given case depends on the nature of what is being evaluated, and what it is being evaluated as.<sup>43</sup>

*Footian Naturalism:* The way 'good' is used when assessing human beings ought not to be wholly distinct from how it is used when assessing plants or non-human animals in the natural world.<sup>44</sup>

These are the main components of Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, with the latter two ideas being attributed to Philippa Foot.<sup>45</sup> For Hursthouse, the moral virtues are those that make their possessor good *qua* human being, and how we understand being good *qua* human being ought not to be wholly distinct from how we understand other evaluations in the natural world. If we want to understand what it would mean to be a good human being (and so to then work out which traits are the moral virtues) then we should first consider how we would assess a particular plant as being a good plant, or how we would assess a particular tiger as being a good tiger.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. [Book I, Chapter 13 and Book II Chapter 6] (For an explanation of the features required in order to class as a form of *Aristotelian* virtue ethics, see Watson (1997) pp.61–62 and Hursthouse (1999b) p. 68.)

<sup>41</sup> Hursthouse (1999) Part III

<sup>42</sup> See Ibid. p. 192

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 195–197

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. pp. 196–197

<sup>45</sup> Foot's own account can be found in *Natural Goodness* (2001).

*Good as Attributive* tells us that the very same object can be correctly evaluated as a ‘good X’ while at the same time failing to be a ‘good Y’. The relevant standards will be determined by what the thing is being evaluated *as*. A particular guitar may be classed as a good piece of memorabilia (because it has been signed by a famous rock star) while at the same time being classed as a bad musical instrument (because it is out-of-tune and missing several strings). If we want to know what makes for a good plant or a good tiger then we need to know how evaluation works in these cases. According to Hursthouse, biologists will evaluate a plant by looking at its various aspects (in a sense to be explained shortly) and assessing how these aspects enable the plant to meet certain ends, in a way that is characteristic of its particular species.<sup>46</sup> The aspects in question include the plant’s *parts* (petals, roots, leaves, and so on) and the plant’s *operations or reactions* (turning towards sunlight, producing seeds, and so on). These aspects are evaluated as good or bad depending on how well-fitted they make the plant for meeting the ends of *individual survival* and *continuance of the species*. If the aspects of a plant enable it to attain these ends (in ways characteristic of the species) then we can evaluate the plant as being good *qua* plant.

*Footian Naturalism* requires that our approach to evaluation ought not to be considerably different once we come to be interested in evaluating individuals as being good *qua* human being. Of course, we will expect things to be more complicated in the case of animals than in the case of plants. According to Hursthouse, as we “ascend the ladder of nature” we need to add to our list of aspects and ends in order to accommodate this added complexity.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, in the case of the higher social animals (such as human beings), the account that Hursthouse settles upon is the following:

So, summing up, a good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the

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<sup>46</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 198

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



good functioning of its social group – in the ways characteristic of the species.<sup>48</sup>

A good human being, therefore, will be one whose relevant aspects (listed above) combine to make them well-fitted for attaining the relevant ends (listed above). However, one further clarification is required here. Hursthouse believes that evaluation in the case of human beings is slightly more complicated in the sense that we ought to distinguish moral evaluation from evaluation with a more medical focus. Regarding the relevant aspects, we ought to leave evaluation of an agent's parts (body parts) and operations (bodily functions) to the realm of medicine, and focus only on their other aspects when attempting to make a moral evaluation.<sup>49</sup> Such a move is necessary if we are to avoid the conclusion that an agent can be considered morally defective as a result of damaged or malfunctioning body parts or bodily systems. Having removed these aspects from the equation, the account we are left with is the following:

human beings are ethically good in so far as their ethically relevant aspects foster the four ends appropriate to a social animal, in the way characteristic of the species.<sup>50</sup>

The virtues, therefore, are the character traits that are involved in making a human being good in this way. As Christopher Gowans has explained, the form of ethical naturalism proposed by Hursthouse makes the following claim regarding the identity of the virtues:

A character trait C is a virtue only if (a) C promotes in a substantial way at least one of the four ends, and (b) C does not significantly inhibit the four ends.<sup>51</sup>

And Hursthouse argues that this approach will produce an intuitively acceptable list of the moral virtues. She does this by considering traits widely accepted as being moral virtues and by showing that they do indeed make an individual well-fitted for attaining the ends highlighted by her naturalist approach. For example, she suggests that:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 202

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp. 206–207

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 224

<sup>51</sup> Gowans (2008) p. 37

Human beings who are good in so far as they are courageous defend themselves, and their young, and each other, and risk life and limb to defend and preserve worthwhile things in and about their group, thereby fostering their individual survival, the continuance of the species, their own and other's enjoyment of various good things, and the good functioning of the social group.<sup>52</sup>

For this reason, the widely accepted candidate virtue of courage would be accepted by Hursthouse's approach. Similar defences are provided for the traits of justice, honesty, and charity, as shown by the following two quotes: "it has long been commonplace that justice and fidelity to promises enable us to function *as* a social, co-operating group" and "Charity directed to the young and helpless particularly serves the continuance of the species; directed more widely it serves the good functioning of the social group".<sup>53</sup> If these claims are correct, then Hursthouse's approach will have provided a list of moral virtues that includes charity, justice, honesty and courage. Such results ought to be accepted as being in line with widely held intuitions. Indeed, these results prompt Hursthouse to suggest that:

if this naturalistic project were to be pursued, there is no reason at the moment to suppose that it would yield a bizarre characterisation of a good human being<sup>54</sup>

If Hursthouse is correct then the approach will also yield an acceptable list of the moral virtues. I will now argue that we have less reason to be optimistic in this regard than Hursthouse supposes.

### 3.2 PROBLEMS FOR HURSTHOUSE'S APPROACH

Hursthouse's brand of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism has been much commented upon in the literature, with many different objections to the approach being proposed. David Copp and David Sobel argue that Hursthouse's approach is arbitrary, in the sense that she provides no justification for focusing on the evaluation of plants and animals from the perspectives of biology and ethology as opposed to from the perspective of

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<sup>52</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 209

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. pp. 209–210

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 211

other scientific disciplines (such as evolutionary biology or veterinary science) which may produce different results.<sup>55</sup> They also argue that the focus on *species* membership (rather than focusing on individuals as bearers of a particular genotype, or as members of a local population, or of a particular genus) is also unexplained and unjustified by Hursthouse.<sup>56</sup> And Gowans has argued that Hursthouse's approach suffers from indeterminacy due to its failure to fully explain key terms, such as "social group", when setting out the account of a good human being.<sup>57</sup> By choosing not to focus on these concerns, I do not mean to suggest that they are unproblematic for Hursthouse. It may be that any one of these worries would require a significant defence and, ultimately, the amendment or rejection of the naturalist approach. However, the most relevant objection to Hursthouse's approach for my purposes will be to show that it would lead us to accept the virtue status of character traits that are intuitively unvirtuous. This is the line of criticism that I will look to pursue.

Hursthouse's approach allows for a character trait to be a virtue if it promotes in a substantial way one or more of the four relevant ends without at the same time significantly inhibiting any of those ends.<sup>58</sup> Hursthouse suggests that this supports the virtue status of charity because helping the young promotes the continuance of the species, and she suggests that it supports the virtue status of justice because this helps the good functioning of any social group. However, there is a problem here. The four ends included in this approach make no mention of the well-being or interests of those who are outside of the individual's own social group. Being charitable towards our children or towards our fellow group members may well promote the stated ends, but charity with a wider scope does not appear to be required. Similarly, acting justly towards those in our social group will help to promote the good functioning of that group, but this will not require us to be just in our dealings with those outside of our own group. Hursthouse's approach, therefore, appears to classify as virtuous, forms of (for example) charity and justice that are *exclusionary* in the sense that they extend concern only up to the boundaries of the individual's own social group. Furthermore, character traits that are more actively exclusionary (such as the trait of being prejudiced against or suspicious

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<sup>55</sup> Copp and Sobel (2004) pp. 534–536 (The same worry is expressed by Sandler (2005) pp. 386–387.)

<sup>56</sup> Copp and Sobel (2004) p. 536

<sup>57</sup> Gowans (2008) pp. 31–32

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Hursthouse (2002).

towards outsiders) look to be compatible with being perfectly virtuous on this account.<sup>59</sup> Such a characterisation of the virtues (and of a good human being) is not intuitively acceptable.<sup>60</sup>

A related objection to Hursthouse is discussed by Gowans. Gowans believes that any ethical theory ought to provide support for the claim that each human being is deserving of serious moral consideration, a thesis he terms “Moral Universalism”.<sup>61</sup> He then argues that what he calls Hursthouse’s “Teleological Framework” will be unable to explain why the virtuous agent would accept such a position, rather than instead extending concern only to members of their own social group.<sup>62</sup> This objection (plus the further objection that Hursthouse’s approach suggests that virtuous agents must be inclined to reproduce so as to further the continuance of the species in a characteristic way), leads to the claim that:

A straightforward application of the Teleological Criterion would suggest that virtuous human beings would have character traits that (among other things) lead them to reproduce, raise children, and promote the interests of their own social group. If we think (as many, including Foot and Hursthouse, do) that virtuous persons need not conceive and raise children, and should be concerned about human beings well beyond their social group, then we are relying on considerations that have no basis in the Teleological Framework.<sup>63</sup>

The main point for our purposes is that the account of virtues supported by Hursthouse’s neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is not intuitive. It allows for the virtue status of traits which involve a concern only for group members, and which are compatible with acting cruelly or unjustly towards non-group members.

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<sup>59</sup> I am assuming that these traits, while intuitively unappealing, pose no risk to the continuance of the species.

<sup>60</sup> The exclusionary worry is also relevant for our treatment of non-human animals, as promotion of their well-being is not a stated end within Hursthouse’s neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. See Hooker (2002) pp. 33–40.

<sup>61</sup> Gowans (2008) pp. 39–50

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 52

There is a further worry for Hursthouse's approach. We saw above that a good human being will be well-fitted so as to promote "the good functioning of its social group". If we are to understand this as referring to the particular social group to which the individual belongs then this will lead to a worrying form of relativism. The character traits that help an individual to promote and maintain the functioning of their social group will be different for different social groups. Traits such as faith or piety or respect for traditions may be vital for the good functioning of a highly theistic society, and yet be of significantly less benefit in an atheist or secular society. For a more extreme example, consider societies based on a rigid caste system, or where minority groups are systematically exploited in some way. In these social groups, traits such as a general resignation to one's fate, timidity in the face of injustice, or (misguided) elitism may all play an important role in allowing the society to continue to function. If so, those character traits would be classed as virtues for those living in such a society. If we are to evaluate an individual depending on their being well-fitted to promote the functioning of their own particular social group, then the ethical naturalist approach will lead to further unintuitive consequences.

A final objection to this approach focuses on another of the key ends listed by Hursthouse. It is worth highlighting the strangeness of including "individual survival" as a relevant end for ethical evaluation. Admittedly, many of the possible unintuitive consequences of including this as a key end are tempered by the inclusion of the other ends that are listed. Many of the traits that could best further individual survival will be inimical to these other ends. For example, absolute selfishness or extreme paranoia may further individual survival, but they do not look to be compatible with the good functioning of a social group. However, other unappealing traits do seem to be compatible with that further end. Consider the individual who is disposed to let others perform any laborious or dangerous task, and who will only step in if no one else will do so. Such an agent will possess a character trait that furthers individual survival (as they are less likely to perform dangerous tasks) while not harming the functioning of the social group (as necessary tasks are still performed). And yet their trait does not look to be a plausible moral virtue. The same result is generated by the trait of effective false modesty. This trait promotes individual survival (as the individual will be well-liked) without harming the functioning of the social group (so long as the false modesty is

effective). But again, this does not look to be a plausible candidate virtue. Unease at accepting these traits may stem from the intuition that a greater ability to secure one's own survival ought not to necessarily correspond to a greater level of moral worth. But regardless of the explanation for this unease, the objections considered here ought to be sufficient to cast doubt on the intuitive acceptability of Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. If these objections cannot be refuted then we will have good reason to reject that approach.

### 3.3 CONSIDERING (AND REJECTING) A POSSIBLE RESPONSE

Applying Hursthouse's approach in an attempt to identify the moral virtues leads to certain unintuitive conclusions. These conclusions will only be avoided if we can change the way in which we apply the approach when attempting to evaluating human beings. And a possible rationale for such a change can be found if we focus on an element of Hursthouse's account that has so far gone unexplained. According to Hursthouse, a good example of a human being is one whose various aspects make it well-fitted to attain the various ends *in ways characteristic of the species*. For other animals, this notion is a statistical one. King penguins tend to guard their mate's egg and so one who fails to do so is not acting in a way characteristic of their species.<sup>64</sup> Lionesses tend to suckle their cubs and so one who does not do this is failing to act in a way characteristic of their species.<sup>65</sup> After setting out the general approach, Hursthouse goes on to suggest that "characteristic of the species" should be understood differently in the case of human beings. It is to be understood as follows:

Our characteristic way of going on, which distinguishes us from all the other species of animals, is a rational way. A 'rational way' is any way that we can *rightly* see as good, as something we in fact have reason to do... [I]o maintain, as I am recklessly doing, that 'our characteristic way of going on' is to do what we can rightly see we have reason to do, is to give up with a vengeance any idea that most human beings do what it is 'characteristic' of human beings to do.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 199

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. pp. 222–223 (emphasis added)

Of course, we may be surprised that a naturalist approach would have the result that the way of life “characteristic” of a species could be one which no member of that species has ever exemplified, and this worry has been expressed elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> However, if we can switch the meaning of “characteristic of the species” from a statistical one to a normative one, then this will help to rule out the kinds of unintuitive conclusions that I highlighted earlier.

When applying the naturalist approach to humans in a straightforward way, intuitively problematic traits will be identified as virtues. This is because some problematic traits look likely to further at least one of the four stated ends, without at the same time inhibiting any of the other ends. However, it is less clear that these traits will further those ends “in ways characteristic of the species” if this latter term is read as “in ways that can be rightly seen as good”. Extending charity only to your own social group may well be characteristic of human beings in the sense that it is fairly common, but it is less clear that it counts as acting in a way that can be rightly seen as good. And the same goes for the other problematic traits that I identified in the previous section. Modifying the way the approach works when applying it to human beings will therefore help Hursthouse to avoid being committed to the problematic conclusions that I have identified.

However, the problem now is that the overall approach appears somewhat empty. Previously, it was possible to determine whether or not a given trait was a moral virtue by asking whether or not the possession of that trait would make an individual well-fitted for attaining any of the four ends (without also inhibiting any of those ends). Now that we are to understand the account differently, being virtuous will involve acting in ways which can rightly be thought of as good, or on reasons that are actual reasons. And we are then offered no account of which reasons are actual or of which ways of acting are rightly seen as good. Without this there is no way of working out whether or not a given trait counts as a virtue, because we have no way of knowing whether it involves acting in a way in which we can rightly see ourselves as having reason to act. The approach avoids the worry of endorsing an implausible list of the moral virtues only by

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<sup>67</sup> Stohr and Wellman (2002) p. 60

being rendered incapable of producing any set list of the virtues at all. And this inability provides us with good reason to reject the amended version of Hursthouse's approach.

It is worth mentioning one final problem with this proposed response. The response requires us to treat the evaluation of human beings differently from the evaluation of plants or other animals, by changing the way in which we interpret the phrase "characteristic of the species". And we need to ask what can justify this change. Given what has come before, Hursthouse's explanation of why we can do things differently in the case of human beings (when compared to the case of other animals) is puzzling:

Nature determines how they should be, but the idea that nature could be normative with respect to us, that it could determine how we should be, is one we will no longer accept.<sup>68</sup>

It is not clear that such a position is available to a committed supporter of ethical naturalism. The possible inconsistency in Hursthouse's thinking has been highlighted by Copp and Sobel:

The dilemma is, in short, that she must either reject Footian naturalism or accept that nature can be normative with respect to us. If she rejects the idea that nature can be normative with respect to us, as she does, and if she concedes that, for humans, the normatively appropriate way of going on is to act in ways that we can rightly see ourselves as having reason to act, as she does, she must give up the Footian naturalism.<sup>69</sup>

This dilemma is particularly troubling given the points that have been made here. If Hursthouse chooses to ultimately reject *Footian Naturalism* then she will not have provided an account that is capable of identifying a set list of the moral virtues. If she instead chooses to endorse *Footian Naturalism*, and to treat the evaluation of human beings in the same way as the evaluation of other animals, then her account will have seriously unintuitive consequences. Either way, we will have good reason to reject Hursthouse's approach.

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<sup>68</sup> Hursthouse (1999) p. 220

<sup>69</sup> Copp and Sobel (2004) p. 541



I have now considered two of the most influential alternatives to the fundamental value approach to identifying the moral virtues. Serious objections have been raised for both the consequentialist approach and the neo-Aristotelian approach. We therefore have good reason to re-consider the fundamental value approach in order to assess whether or not the objections to that approach can be overcome, and whether or not that approach might lead to a plausible overall picture of the moral virtues.

#### **4. RE-ASSESSING THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUE APPROACH**

The fundamental value approach to identifying the moral virtues says that the value of virtuous traits ought not to be explained by reference to some other concept or idea. Instead, the virtues are taken to be fundamentally valuable. It was pointed out above that this approach faces the challenge of explaining how we can identify such fundamentally valuable traits. Daniel Russell has argued that if we rely solely on intuitions then it will be difficult to resolve disputes regarding which traits are fundamentally valuable (and therefore virtuous), and that the intuitions themselves may be problematically influenced by societal factors. There are two important points that ought to be made at this stage. The first highlights the fact that the fundamental value approach is not alone in facing a challenge in ensuring that we are able to satisfactorily resolve disputes regarding which traits are the moral virtues. The second highlights the fact that the fundamental value approach is able to provide guidance on how to proceed in cases where we are unsure of the accuracy of our intuitions.

The fundamental value approach claims that certain character traits are fundamentally valuable and that this value ought not to be explained by reference to other concepts. This leads to the problem of how we can be sure that intuitions regarding the virtuousness of traits aren't being problematically influenced by societal or other factors, as well as the problem of how to resolve disagreements regarding the correct list of the virtues. Suppose that we take the list of fundamentally valuable virtuous traits to include only Plato's cardinal virtues of courage, wisdom, moderation and justice. When an opponent disagrees with this list, claiming that the fundamentally valuable virtuous traits are instead kindness, faith and piety, it is difficult to see how we might determine who is right. A way forward would be provided if we accept either of the rival approaches that

have been discussed in this chapter. In cases of disagreement, these rival approaches would direct us to consider whether or not the traits that have been identified systematically promote the well-being of others, or whether they would make an agent well-fitted to achieve the four ends listed by Hursthouse. This would help to reveal whether or not a proposed list of the moral virtues is accurate, or whether that list ought instead to be amended. Either way, the rival approaches discussed in this chapter appear to offer a resolution to the stalemate in a way that the fundamental value approach does not.

However, while this may look like a step in the right direction, it actually only pushes the original problem back a stage. Previously an opponent could simply refuse to accept a list of fundamentally valuable traits. Now the opponent can refuse to accept the proposed underlying explanation for the virtuousness of those traits. That is, an opponent can refuse to accept that the moral virtues must systematically promote the well-being of others, or that the moral virtues must make us well-fitted for achieving the four ends identified by Hursthouse. Such a refusal could take any number of forms. For example, an opponent might argue that the moral virtues ought instead to be identified by their role in bringing agents closer to God.<sup>70</sup> At this stage the discussion will once again reach an impasse. And it is not clear that this impasse is any less problematic than that faced by the fundamental value approach. Whatever ultimate basis we provide in our explanation for the value of virtuous traits, it will be possible for an opponent to disagree with that basis. Therefore, being unable to avoid the possibility of such disagreement ought not to be considered a fatal flaw for any theory of the virtues. The fundamental value approach ought not to be rejected in response to such considerations.

It is also important to point out that the fundamental value approach can provide some guidance on how we ought to adjudicate between competing lists of the moral virtues. In *Morals from Motives*, Slote considers two broad forms of the fundamental value approach: one on which (only) “inner strength” is taken to be fundamentally valuable and one on which (only) benevolence is taken to be fundamentally valuable.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, he favours the latter type of approach, preferring a view which “bases all morality on the aretaic

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<sup>70</sup> Augustine appears to have thought that virtue ought to be understood solely in terms of loving God. Slote discusses this view (quoting *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 15.25) in Slote (1998) p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> Slote (2001) (Of the latter he considers versions based on both partial and impartial benevolence.)

value, the moral admirability, of benevolence”.<sup>72</sup> In attempting to decide between the two options, Slote suggests a general method for evaluating different versions of the fundamental value approach. When presented with a list of traits that are taken to be fundamentally valuable (and therefore virtuous) we ought to consider the overall picture of virtuous character that this would suggest. If we are virtue ethicists (like Slote) then we can also plug the proposed list of moral virtues into our preferred account of right action, and see what results would be generated. As Copp and Sobel have explained, Slote’s method tells us to move back and forth between the list of fundamental virtues and the overall picture of the moral life that they imply, amending either the traits listed on the former, or our intuitions regarding the latter, until we reach some form of “reflective equilibrium”.<sup>73</sup> In other words:

claims about the admirability of traits of character can be tested for plausibility in the familiar way by assessing the intuitive plausibility of the other ethical judgements that they support as well as the plausibility of the overall ethical view that would result from taking them as fundamental to all ethical judgement.<sup>74</sup>

It is this method that leads Slote to reject the account that lists inner strength as the only fundamental moral virtue. Slote believes that this implies a view of virtuous character that is implausible:

The problem, in a nutshell, is that morality as strength treats sentiments or motives like benevolence, compassion, kindness, and the like as only *derivatively* admirable and morally good. And this seems highly implausible to the modern moral consciousness... it seems to distort the aretaic value we place on compassion, benevolence, kindness, and caring for others to regard them as needing justification in terms of the (cool) ideal of inner strength or indeed any other different value.<sup>75</sup>

The list of fundamental moral virtues that includes only “inner strength” leads to an overall view of virtuous character that appears implausible. This encourages Slote to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 23

<sup>73</sup> Copp and Sobel (2004) p.521

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 518

<sup>75</sup> Slote (2001) p. 23

instead favour a list of fundamental virtues that includes only forms of benevolence or caring.<sup>76</sup> While Slote believes that other traits, such as moderation or strength of purpose, may class as “rational” virtues, the account that he wants to evaluate is one on which the moral virtues are all forms of benevolence or caring.<sup>77</sup> And *Morals from Motives* sets out to defend the claim that the overall picture of virtuous character (and the related account of right action) that stems from such a list of virtues is a plausible one. I do not want to question Slote’s claim that something like benevolence or caring ought to be included as a fundamentally valuable trait and, therefore, a moral virtue. However, the view that this is the *only* fundamentally valuable trait is problematic. This can be shown by considering worries that have been raised for accounts that take morality to be (exclusively) concerned with benevolence. These worries point towards the need to also recognise the independent (fundamental) value of the trait of justice.

Driver considers various ways of distinguishing the moral virtues on the way to developing her own account (discussed above) whereby the moral virtues are those which produce well-being for others and the intellectual virtues are those which produce epistemic good for the individual.<sup>78</sup> One alternative that is considered and rejected is the idea that all of the moral virtues can be taken to involve a motivation of benevolence. The explanation for the rejection of this account is brief but instructive:

There are... reasons for doubting that moral virtues have benevolence as a characteristic motivation: it is unclear that this needs to be the case for virtues like justice and honesty, for example. Then there is Hume’s point that we do think persons can have a variety of moral virtues that are distinctive, and this becomes difficult to spell out if all of them are understood simply in terms of being motivated by benevolence.<sup>79</sup>

The main point here is that there are traits which ought intuitively to be included as moral virtues and yet cannot be plausibly understood as simply being forms of benevolence. And justice (understood as a personal character trait as opposed to a

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<sup>76</sup> It is unclear why Slote doesn’t simply *add* benevolence to the list that includes inner strength, rather than removing inner strength altogether in favour of benevolence. I will not consider this issue here.

<sup>77</sup> See *Ibid.* Chapter 8.

<sup>78</sup> Driver (2003)

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 372

positive feature of institutions or nation states) looks to be a prime example.<sup>80</sup> Just as the failure to give a plausible account of the virtue of benevolence causes Slote to reject the “inner strength” form of the fundamental value approach, so too does the failure to account for the virtue of justice provide us with reason to reject the benevolence or care-based form of that approach. Instead, we ought to evaluate the plausibility of a view on which *both* (something like) benevolence *and* justice are viewed as being fundamentally virtuous traits.

Slote dismisses without explanation the possibility that there might be more than one fundamentally virtuous trait, preferring instead to focus on setting out his preferred care-based form of virtue ethics.<sup>81</sup> Had he considered possible additions to his list of fundamental virtues, it is likely that the trait of justice would have been taken to be a plausible candidate. This is because Slote is aware that other care-based approaches to ethics have been thought of as incomplete because of their failure to focus on concepts such as justice. He acknowledges that previous forms of care ethics (such as those present in the work of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings) look as if they need to be “supplemented by justice ethics in order to represent a complete normative conception of morality”.<sup>82</sup> In order to demonstrate why his own theory is invulnerable to these worries, Slote attempts to explain how justice actually *can* be understood purely in terms of caring. Highlighting the unsatisfactory nature of this attempt will provide further support for the claim that a plausible version of the fundamental value approach would acknowledge the fundamental value of both (something like) benevolence and justice.

Slote has elaborated his account of “justice as benevolence” in several places, and the central idea has remained constant.<sup>83</sup> Slote believes that the justice or injustice of *laws* and *institutions* can be determined by whether or not the creators of those laws and institutions were suitably motivated by benevolence: “A law, for example, will be just (at the time it is promulgated) when it doesn’t reflect selfishness, malice, or some other deficiency in universal benevolence on the part of (enough of) those responsible for its

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<sup>80</sup> The quote from Driver also mentions the trait of honesty. I will discuss honesty in detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>81</sup> Slote (2001) p. 37

<sup>82</sup> Slote (2011) p. 92

<sup>83</sup> See Slote (2001) Ch.4, as well as Baron, Pettit and Slote (1997) pp. 274–280, and Slote (1998) pp. 171–195.

existence”.<sup>84</sup> According to Slote, we ought to consider a law or institution (or society) as being just, as long as enough of its members or creators have kind (rather than malevolent) motivations, and regardless of any other factors. This is how Slote argues that his care-based ethical theory is able to suitably accommodate ideas of justice, without the need for supplementation from any additional justice-based component.

This approach provides an implausible account of the justice of laws and institutions. It is possible for a law to be unjust even when those involved in implementing the law have the best of benevolent intentions. Imagine a society where (enough of) the lawmakers genuinely but wrongly believe some sub-group of their members to be inferior and in need of protection. The benevolence of the lawmakers may then lead them to pass paternalistic laws that limit the freedom of members of that sub-group. Of course (as Slote points out in response to a similar objection), we will often have good reason to doubt the benevolence of such lawmakers, thinking them to instead be motivated by self-interest or a desire for power.<sup>85</sup> But, in some cases, the lawmakers may truly be motivated by misguided benevolence, and in these cases Slote will be forced to accept that the laws they pass are not only benevolent but are also just. Furthermore, Slote accepts that his view implies that it could be just to convict and punish someone for a crime they did not commit.<sup>86</sup> This appears to be particularly problematic if we consider the famous thought experiment of the sheriff who must decide whether or not to convict and punish an innocent man in order to prevent the destructive rampage of an angry mob.<sup>87</sup> If the sheriff’s decision to convict the innocent man is motivated by benevolent concern for the community as a whole, then Slote will be forced to accept that the conviction is not only benevolent (and, therefore, morally right), but also that it is just. Slote’s account of just institutions, laws, and societies is not intuitively acceptable.

Furthermore, Slote’s approach fails to address justice understood as a virtue held by *individuals*. Justice, understood as involving something like a deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes, appears to be clearly distinct from considerations of benevolence or

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<sup>84</sup> Slote, in Baron, Pettit and Slote (1997) pp. 275–276

<sup>85</sup> See Slote (2001) pp. 103–107

<sup>86</sup> Slote (1998) p. 191

<sup>87</sup> This example appears in Robert Nozick’s ‘The Rationality of Side-Constraints’, re-printed in Shafer-Landau (ed.) (2013) pp. 521–523.

caring.<sup>88</sup> And justice also appears to be intuitively (morally) valuable as a character trait. By failing to address this issue, Slote does not do enough to defend his own care-based version of the fundamental value approach from the charge that it fails to provide an adequate picture of an overall virtuous character.

We therefore have good reason to amend Slote's care-based version of the fundamental value approach. The resulting picture of overall virtuous character that is suggested by Slote's account, as well as the results that it generates in particular cases, should encourage us to consider an amendment. And the obvious amendment at this point would be to consider an account that accepts Slote's claim about the fundamental value of something like "benevolence, kindness, and caring" but then also accepts the fundamental value of justice. Setting out the structure and implications of an account that treats kindness and justice as fundamentally virtuous traits will be the focus of the next chapter.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to evaluate different methods for identifying which traits ought to be accepted as moral virtues. Support for the fundamental value approach has been provided by arguing against two influential rival approaches to this issue: Julia Driver's consequentialist approach and Rosalind Hursthouse's neo-Aristotelian approach. I then explained why Michael Slote's own care-based version of the fundamental value approach is insufficient by highlighting the need to account for the virtuousness of the trait of justice. We have good reason to consider a view on which both the trait of benevolence (or kindness) and the trait of justice are fundamentally virtuous traits. However, it is not yet clear what such a view would look like, or whether that view would result in a plausible overall picture of the moral life. In the final chapter of this work I will set out an account of the moral virtues which lists kindness and justice as being fundamentally virtuous traits, as well as considering some of the implications of accepting this account.

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<sup>88</sup> Miranda Fricker's discussion of the virtue of testimonial justice highlights one way in which an agent can be benevolent while nevertheless failing to possess an important form of the trait of justice. See, Fricker (2007). The discussion of Herbert Greenleaf on pp. 100–108 is especially relevant to this issue.

## CHAPTER SIX: A CARDINAL STRUCTURE FOR THE MORAL VIRTUES

### 0. INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this thesis so far has been to defend the view that the possession of a deep motivation (towards a virtuous end) is sufficient for the possession of a moral virtue. This has involved arguing against other, more popular approaches (such as the skills and composite models) as well as responding to objections directly targeted at the motivations model. In the previous chapter I moved on to evaluate ways of identifying *which* deep motivations ought to be accepted as moral virtues. I first provided support for the fundamental value approach by arguing against influential rival approaches. I then argued that Michael Slote's care-based version of the fundamental value approach is insufficient due to its failure to properly accommodate the trait of justice (understood as a personal character trait rather than as a feature of societies or institutions). There is good reason to consider the merits of an account on which *both* kindness and justice are viewed as fundamentally virtuous traits.

In this chapter I will develop and support the suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits. I will first provide more detail for this suggestion by proposing a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. This task will be made easier by first explaining Linda Zagzebski's influential account of the intellectual virtues. I will aim to move beyond Zagzebski in two significant ways: firstly, by explaining how her account of the intellectual virtues lends itself to a cardinal understanding of those traits, and, secondly, by arguing that this cardinal picture can also be successfully applied to the moral virtues. I will defend my proposed cardinal understanding of the moral virtues by arguing that it is able to provide convincing accounts of specific candidate virtues, as well as by demonstrating how the cardinal structure can help to resolve certain problems currently faced by all virtue theorists. These considerations will provide strong support for the acceptance of the cardinal understanding that I propose in this chapter. However, before setting out this account, it may be worth briefly highlighting the radical nature of the suggestion that I will be defending.

Contemporary virtue theorists have been fairly unrestrained when listing virtuous traits. Alongside the usual suspects such as justice, honesty, courage, and kindness, we find



less familiar suggestions such as the virtue of “diachronic consistency”<sup>1</sup> and the virtue of “reflexive critical openness”.<sup>2</sup> Theorists have also proposed situation-specific virtues, such as Hursthouse’s virtues of good parenting and of environmental concern,<sup>3</sup> as well as the many virtues that have been suggested as relevant for different professions.<sup>4</sup> It is some indication of the range of virtues that are taken to exist that the index to Robert Adams’ *A Theory of Virtue* contains reference to over sixty virtue terms.<sup>5</sup> And the tendency to assume a large number of different virtues should not be mistaken as a modern phenomenon. David Hume is noted to have mentioned more than thirty different virtues in a single passage.<sup>6</sup> It is against this background that we need to assess the suggestion that kindness and justice are the moral virtues. At first glance such a list of virtues appears suspiciously lightweight, and we may be concerned that it cannot account for the true richness of moral life. Indeed, it looks as if accepting the suggestion that *only* kindness and justice are moral virtues has the potential to make a falsehood of Daniel Russell’s claim that “no contemporary virtue theorist seems to be in danger of making the virtues too few.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if this suggestion is to have more to recommend it than sheer novelty, it will be necessary to offer some sort of defence. In particular, it will be necessary to both further explain the suggestion, and to provide reasons in support of accepting the suggestion. It will be useful to begin this task by first considering Zagzebski’s account of the intellectual virtues.

## 1. ZAGZEBSKI’S ACCOUNT OF THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

Linda Zagzebski’s *Virtues of the Mind* is widely accepted as a key text within virtue epistemology, as well as being an important and influential work within virtue theory more generally. Zagzebski sets out an account of the nature of the virtues that has

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<sup>1</sup> Slote (2001) p. 177

<sup>2</sup> Fricker (2003) p. 154

<sup>3</sup> On the virtue of good parenting, see Hursthouse (1999) pp. 213–214. On the virtues of environmental concern, see Hursthouse (2007).

<sup>4</sup> A selection of professions-based virtues can be found in the contributions to Walker and Ivanhoe (eds.) (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Adams (2006)

<sup>6</sup> See Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section 6, Part 1, (as printed 2011). Hume’s list is also noted in Zagzebski (1996) p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Russell (2009) p. 151

already been discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis. According to Zagzebski, a virtue consists of two components:

A virtue therefore has two main elements: a motivational element and an element of reliable success in bringing about the end (internal or external) of the motivational element.<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter I want to focus on the motivational element that Zagzebski mentions and, in particular, to look at the motivational component that is suggested for the intellectual virtues. Zagzebski's position is that a motivation is "a persistent tendency to be moved by a motive of a certain kind",<sup>9</sup> while a motive "is an emotion or feeling that initiates and directs action towards an end".<sup>10</sup> On Zagzebski's view, therefore, the motivational element of a virtue consists in the agent being directed towards some characteristic end. For example, Zagzebski suggests that the virtue of benevolence involves being directed towards the well-being of others.<sup>11</sup> This is the general understanding of the motivational component of virtue that is proposed by Zagzebski.

When moving on to discuss the intellectual virtues, Zagzebski introduces an important complication into this picture. Intellectual virtues are widely taken to include traits such as intellectual rigour, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, intellectual fairness, and so on. According to Zagzebski, all of these intellectual virtues will share the *same* underlying motivation: the motivation for "cognitive contact with reality" (where this is taken to include the motivation for knowledge and the motivation for understanding).<sup>12</sup> While all of the intellectual virtues share this one underlying motivation, specific intellectual virtues also involve specific proximal motivations. For example, the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness might involve the specific proximal motivation to ask questions, where this proximal motivation is grounded in a more fundamental motivation to achieve knowledge (or "cognitive contact with reality"). Zagzebski provides her own examples of the specific proximal motivations for some candidate intellectual virtues:

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<sup>8</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 137

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 132

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 132

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Part II, Section 4.1 (esp. pp. 166–168)

We have seen that all intellectual virtues arise out of the motivation for knowledge and include an internal aim to operate cognitively in a way that is believed to be knowledge conducive, a way that is unique to each virtue. So the aim of open-mindedness is to be receptive to new ideas and arguments even when they conflict with one's own in order to ultimately get knowledge. The aim of intellectual thoroughness is to exhaustively investigate the evidence pertaining to a particular belief or a set of questions in order to ultimately get knowledge. The aim of intellectual courage is to defend one's belief or a line of inquiry when one has good reason to be confident that it is on the right track, and to fearlessly answer objections from others in order to ultimately get knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Every intellectual virtue involves its own proximal motivation, as well as sharing in the general underlying motivation for knowledge or for cognitive contact with reality. This aspect of Zagzebski's account has been highlighted by other theorists. Jason Baehr explains that "for Zagzebski, to possess a particular intellectual virtue V is to be motivated to bring about a certain end characteristic of V out of a deeper or more ultimate motivation to achieve knowledge or 'cognitive contact with reality.'"<sup>14</sup> And Miranda Fricker borrows Zagzebski's general understanding of the virtues when setting out her own influential account of the virtue of "testimonial justice", saying that: "In the case of intellectual virtues there will always be a motivation to achieve truth in one or another guise, but usually there will also be a more proximal aim to achieve something that is conducive to truth – notably here, the aim of neutralizing the impact of prejudice in one's credibility judgements."<sup>15</sup> This ought to be enough to make clear Zagzebski's understanding of the motivational component of the intellectual virtues. Such virtues include both an underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality as well as a specific proximal motivation that is unique to the particular virtue.

My suggestion at the end of the previous chapter was that we can view the candidate moral virtues of kindness and justice as being *fundamentally* virtuous. I now want to further explain that suggestion (and the resulting picture of the moral virtues) with

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 269

<sup>14</sup> Baehr (2011) p. 133

<sup>15</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 99

reference to Zagzebski's account of the intellectual virtues. Importantly, I will move beyond Zagzebski in two significant ways. Firstly, I will suggest that Zagzebski's account of the intellectual virtues fits well within a cardinal understanding of intellectual virtue. Secondly, I will argue that Zagzebski is mistaken when asserting that a similar picture cannot be proposed in relation to the moral virtues.

## 2. PROPOSING A CARDINAL STRUCTURE FOR THE MORAL VIRTUES

A *cardinal understanding* of virtue separates the virtues into two classes: a fundamental (or cardinal) class and a subordinate class. Such understandings of virtue have not been widely endorsed in recent times, to the extent that Daniel Russell marks the rejection of the cardinal structure as a defining feature of contemporary debates.<sup>16</sup> Russell suggests that this feature of current debates involving the virtues can be explained by the dominance of Aristotelian approaches, and by the fact that Aristotle himself does not appear to have accepted a cardinal understanding of the virtues.<sup>17</sup> And yet, the idea that there are some moral virtues which are deserving of special consideration is one that has a strong tradition.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps most famously, in *The Republic* Plato identifies the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation and justice.<sup>19</sup> Russell explains that the idea of these traits as being special 'cardinal' virtues was accepted by the Stoics and, later, by Aquinas.<sup>20</sup> It will be important to be clear on the difference between the fundamental (or cardinal) virtues and the subordinate virtues.

A virtue can be considered as being *subordinate* when it is possible to understand it as being simply one form of a more fundamental virtue. As Aquinas puts the point, the subordinate virtues are specific forms of more general (or cardinal) virtues, such that the subordinate virtues can be understood as being "contained" within the fundamental ones.<sup>21</sup> Russell explains this further when saying that:

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<sup>16</sup> Russell (2009) Part II

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 149

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this, see, for example, Carr (1988), and Oderberg (1999).

<sup>19</sup> Plato (trans. Lee) (1987) pp. 158–160 [Book IV, 441c–442d]

<sup>20</sup> Russell (2009) pp. 148–150, p. 163, and p. 177

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas (trans. Oesterle) (1984) pp. 108–117 [Part II, Question 61]

On a theory like Plato's, the Stoics', or Aquinas', the cardinal virtues are primitive (in fact, the Stoics call them the 'primary virtues'), while the subordinate virtues – what Aquinas calls the 'secondary' or 'derived' virtues, and the 'exercises' – are such that their exercise is not a different kind of thing from the exercise of some primitive (i.e. cardinal) virtue or virtues. On the other hand, without cardinality – as in Aristotle's and all modern theories – all the virtues are primitive, that is, the exercise of any virtue is different from the exercise of any other<sup>22</sup>

An example may help to explain this general idea (in addition to the more detailed discussion of examples in the next section). Russell sets out Aristotle's candidate virtue of magnificence, where this is understood to be possessed by wealthy individuals who make grand (and tasteful) contributions to their polity.<sup>23</sup> Examples of the exercise of magnificence might be found in the organising of important political or cultural events for the public good, such as dramas or public feasts. An important question for the virtue theorist is whether or not magnificence ought to be regarded as a fundamental virtue in its own right, or whether it might best be understood as the mere exercise of some other virtue.<sup>24</sup> Russell argues for the latter view, suggesting that magnificence is a form of the more fundamental virtue of generosity. Both magnificence and generosity are concerned with the application of the same sort of *things* (one's own resources) but, more importantly, the magnificent and the generous agent are also moved by the same *considerations* (the benefit of others).<sup>25</sup> An agent is not virtuously magnificent if their main aim when organising some public feast is self-aggrandisement or political gain. Instead, the virtuously magnificent agent is moved to use their wealth in order to further the public good, and in this sense their aims are shared by the more general virtue of generosity. Magnificence is simply a form of generosity, exercised in the circumstances of having great wealth, and through the method of (for example) organising great public events.

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<sup>22</sup> Russell (2009) p. 163

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Chapter 7

<sup>24</sup> A further option would be to simply deny that magnificence is a virtue, but I will not consider this complication here.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 225

A virtue ought to be considered as subordinate when it can be viewed as being simply a form of one of the more fundamental virtues, exercised in a specific way or in a specific context.<sup>26</sup> To accept such a distinction between types of virtue is to endorse a cardinal understanding of the virtues. In *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski does not discuss the possibility of a cardinal structure and in that sense can be included on the list offered by Russell of contemporary theorists who reject the idea of cardinality.<sup>27</sup> And yet, I want to now suggest that Zagzebski's account of the intellectual virtues fits nicely within an overall cardinal understanding of the virtues.

According to Zagzebski, all of the intellectual virtues share in the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality, but can be distinguished by their differing proximal motivations. The proximal motivation of an intellectual virtue will lead an agent to try to achieve the end of the underlying motivation in a particular way or a particular context. For example, the intellectual virtue of intellectual thoroughness will move an agent to achieve cognitive contact with reality through the exhaustive investigation of evidence. Zagzebski (following Aristotle) provides a picture of the intellectual virtues that is not cardinal. All of the intellectual virtues are on the same level and importantly involve a proximal motivation.

However, the structure suggested by Zagzebski does lend itself to a cardinal understanding. Consider the possibility that an agent could be motivated to achieve cognitive contact with reality in a direct way. Rather than being motivated to achieve this merely through the exhaustive investigation of evidence, or through the asking of questions, an agent might be motivated to achieve cognitive contact with reality *in general*. That is, an agent might be motivated to achieve this in various ways and in various contexts. The agent who possesses a general (and deep) motivation to achieve cognitive contact with reality could then be thought of as possessing a fundamental intellectual virtue. It is not obvious what we should call this fundamental trait, although

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this see Irwin (2005) (especially p. 77).

<sup>27</sup> One theorist who *does* use the language of cardinality when discussing the epistemic virtues is James Montmarquet. Montmarquet talks about the trait of "conscientiousness" in a way that suggests he understands it as being a cardinal epistemic virtue. See Montmarquet (1987).

perhaps “love of knowledge” would be a suitable description.<sup>28</sup> The specific intellectual virtues discussed by Zagzebski would then be understood as subordinate to this more fundamental virtue. They are specific forms or specific exercises of the fundamental virtue. For example, intellectual thoroughness will simply be a form of the more fundamental love of knowledge, exercised through the exhaustive investigation of evidence. Inquisitiveness will also be a form of the love of knowledge, exercised through the asking of questions. And so on for all of the other subordinate intellectual virtues. It is important to be clear that my claim here is not that Zagzebski ought to be interpreted as proposing anything of this sort. Instead, my claim is that an account on which virtues share an underlying motivation lends itself to a cardinal understanding. It becomes possible to view the fundamental virtue(s) as involving a general motivation towards the underlying end(s), while the subordinate virtues involve being motivated towards the end(s) only in a particular way, or in a particular context.

Consider again the starting suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits. My aim is to support this suggestion by proposing an overall picture of the moral virtues that is able to accommodate it, before then demonstrating that this picture has much to recommend it. A first worry for the suggestion is that it cannot account for the true richness of moral life. If we acknowledge only these two moral virtues then we will be missing out on an array of other morally valuable traits, including widely accepted candidate virtues such as honesty and compassion. This worry would be lessened if we were to endorse a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. In this way it would be possible to maintain that kindness and justice are the only (fundamental) moral virtues, while also acknowledging the richness of moral life through the addition of a range of subordinate moral virtues. I have now set out Zagzebski’s account of the intellectual virtues and explained why the idea that virtues share an underlying motivation lends itself to a cardinal understanding of virtue. By proposing an account of the moral virtues which mirrors the amended version of Zagzebski’s account of the

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<sup>28</sup> If we choose this name for our fundamental intellectual virtue then it will be important to remember that ‘cognitive contact with reality’ actually involves more than simply knowledge. It also encompasses understanding and true beliefs. Robert Roberts and Jay Wood dedicate a chapter of their *Intellectual Virtues* to the idea that “love of knowledge” ought to be included as an intellectual virtue. See Roberts and Wood (2007) Chapter 6.

intellectual virtues, it may be possible to support the fundamental virtue status of kindness and justice while also being responsive to the true richness of moral life.

An account whereby the virtues (within some domain) all share in some underlying motivation lends itself to a cardinal understanding of the virtues (within that domain). In the case of the intellectual virtues, Zagzebski's suggestion was that these traits all share in the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality. If we want to consider the possibility of a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues then it would be useful to come up with a shared underlying motivation for this domain. However, Zagzebski provides us with no reason for optimism in this regard. The discussion here is somewhat complicated by the fact that Zagzebski believes the intellectual virtues to constitute a sub-set of the moral virtues.<sup>29</sup> However, she does maintain that we can distinguish this sub-set by the differing motivational structure of the virtues that are involved:

Since all of the intellectual virtues have the same foundational motivation and since all of the other moral virtues have different foundational motivations, this means that a distinction between an intellectual and a moral virtue can be made on the basis of the motivational component of the virtue.<sup>30</sup>

The (other) moral virtues, according to Zagzebski, cannot be unified by appeal to an underlying motivation in the same way that the intellectual virtues can be. If true, this would be damaging to the prospects of a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. However, we ought not to accept Zagzebski's claims here. I now want to suggest that it is possible to come up with shared underlying motivations for virtues within the moral domain, and that these motivations are the ones associated with the fundamentally virtuous traits of kindness and justice.

The fundamentally virtuous trait of kindness can be understood as consisting in the deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. The fundamentally virtuous trait of justice can be understood as consisting in the deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes. The suggestion that these traits are fundamentally virtuous can now be understood as

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<sup>29</sup> Zagzebski (1996) Part II, Section 3

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 166



the claim that these traits are fundamental within a cardinal structure of the moral virtues. If true, this claim would imply that any subordinate moral virtues must involve one of the two motivations involved in the fundamental virtues of kindness and justice. Just as intellectual virtues, such as inquisitiveness or intellectual thoroughness, necessarily involve the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality, so too will any moral virtues necessarily involve either the motivation to protect and promote well-being or the motivation to ensure fair outcomes. Subordinate moral virtues can then be understood as being particular forms or exercises of the more fundamental moral virtues of kindness and justice.

The aim of this section has been to further explain the suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits. The suggestion can now be understood as claiming that kindness and justice are fundamental virtues within a cardinal structure of the moral virtues. This suggestion implies that any other moral virtues are subordinate in the sense that they are merely particular forms or exercises of either kindness or justice. I have not yet provided any reason to accept this suggestion. In order to do so, it will be important to show that the suggestion is in-keeping with plausible accounts of other candidate moral virtues. Just as 'love of knowledge' gains plausibility as a fundamental intellectual virtue through the recognition that other intellectual virtues share in the motivation for cognitive contact with reality, so too will the suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamental moral virtues gain plausibility through the recognition that other moral virtues share in the motivations either for well-being or for fair outcomes. In the next section, I will demonstrate how candidate moral virtues such as honesty and compassion can indeed be plausibly understood as sharing in the fundamental motivations involved in either kindness or justice. This will provide support for the suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamental moral virtues.

### **3. ACCOUNTING FOR SPECIFIC SUBORDINATE VIRTUES**

In order to defend the claim that kindness (understood as a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being) and justice (understood as a deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes) are the fundamental moral virtues, it is important to demonstrate that other widely accepted virtues can be understood as specific forms of these two traits. In this

section I will focus on three candidate moral virtues in order to fully demonstrate this idea, before then also briefly mentioning some additional traits. The first three traits to be considered are honesty, modesty and compassion.

Consider first the trait of honesty. Possession of this trait is widely accepted as being of moral worth, and so it would be a mark against any proposed account of the virtues if honesty were to be excluded from the list. In order to see how honesty can be included as a form of either kindness or justice, it is important to think about what honesty might actually consist in. For example, it is not sufficient for the trait of honesty that an agent just happens to never say anything false. We can imagine a Robinson Crusoe figure whose utter isolation means that he never speaks and so never says anything false. Such a figure would not necessarily possess the trait of honesty.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is not sufficient for honesty that someone regularly (and exclusively) utters truths. We can imagine an agent who wanders around reading aloud every piece of text that they come across and who never happens to stumble upon a falsehood. Such an agent would not thereby possess honesty as a character trait. Instead, honesty requires the possession of some intention or motivation on the part of the agent. An honest agent is one who is deeply motivated to avoid deception. However, it is important to note that this motivation may be grounded in any number of different underlying motivations.

It is possible for an honest agent's motivation to avoid deception to be grounded in a number of different ways. If an agent believes that any deception is likely to be uncovered and severely punished then their motivation to avoid deception may be grounded in an underlying motivation to avoid punishment. Alternatively, if an agent believes that those who speak the truth are more likely to be respected and to receive privileges then their motivation to avoid deception may be grounded in the underlying motivation to gain respect. One interesting possibility for the purposes of this chapter is that an agent's motivation to avoid deception could be grounded in an underlying motivation to protect and promote well-being. Such an agent will be particularly motivated to avoid deception in cases where the deception would be cruel, or where it would not be in the best interests of some other agent. If an agent's honesty is grounded

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<sup>31</sup> Julia Driver considers a Robinson Crusoe example when correctly ruling out a similarly basic account of the trait of modesty. See Driver (2001) pp. 17–18.

in this way then we can view their trait as being a form of the more general trait of kindness. They are motivated to protect and promote well-being in a particular way (through the avoidance of deception), just as the magnificent agent was motivated to be generous in a particular way (through the use of their great wealth to organise grand public events). We can refer to such an honest agent as possessing *honesty-as-kindness*, or honesty as a specific form of kindness. It is also interesting to consider the possibility that an agent's motivation to avoid deception could be grounded in an underlying motivation to ensure fair outcomes. Such an agent will be particularly motivated to avoid deception in cases where it would be unfair to withhold information from another, or where they believe themselves to 'owe it' to another to tell them the truth. The agent can be understood as possessing a specific form of the trait of justice in the sense that they are motivated to ensure fair outcomes in a particular way (through the avoidance of deception). We can refer to such an agent as possessing *honesty-as-justice*. These two examples of the trait of honesty (honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice) are particularly relevant given the claim that kindness and justice are fundamental moral virtues.

If we accept that kindness and justice are fundamental virtues within a cardinal structure of the moral virtues then any other moral virtues must be understood as specific forms or exercises of these fundamental traits. It is clear now that this picture of the moral virtues will be able to include certain forms of honesty on the list of subordinate virtues. Both honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice share in the underlying motivation of a fundamental moral virtue and so can be understood as being specific forms of those fundamental traits. Honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice are therefore included as subordinate moral virtues on this approach. However, other forms of honesty will not be included in this way. It is important to show how the approach to honesty that I am proposing actually helps to produce intuitively acceptable results regarding when (and why) honesty is a moral virtue.

There are cases where an agent should not be praised for possessing the trait of honesty. Imagine an agent who delights in the revealing of cruel and hurtful truths and who decides that 'honesty is the best policy' because this increases their chances of revealing

such truths. Traditional accounts on which honesty is straightforwardly (and always) a moral virtue will be forced to either deny that the agent in this example is honest or else they will be forced to accept that the agent possesses a character trait that is praiseworthy. However, on the cardinal understanding that I am proposing in this chapter, a different and more plausible response becomes available. Only those forms of honesty that share in the underlying motivation of a fundamental moral virtue should be accepted as being (subordinate) moral virtues. The agent whose avoidance of deception is motivated by an underlying desire to reveal hurtful truths can indeed be classed as honest, but they need not be classed as possessing a moral virtue. Forms of honesty that are grounded in negative (or indifferent) underlying motivations ought not to be counted as moral virtues, even if we have no reason to deny that the possessors of those traits are indeed honest individuals. The proposal that only honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice ought to be included as (subordinate) moral virtues provides a way of endorsing this intuitively appealing conclusion.

Before moving on to a second specific candidate virtue, it will be worthwhile to consider one further interesting form of honesty. It may be possible for an agent to possess a form of honesty that is not grounded in *any* further underlying motivation. That is, an agent might possess a deep motivation to avoid deception *for its own sake*. Such an agent does not appear obviously non-virtuous in the same way as the agent whose honest motivation was grounded in the desire to reveal hurtful truths. Indeed, it is not immediately obvious how we ought to judge the moral status of this character trait. Once we accept the idea that all moral virtues involve either the motivation to protect and promote well-being or the motivation to ensure fair outcomes, an answer to this puzzle becomes available.

An agent who is motivated to avoid deception just for the sake of avoiding deception ought not to be viewed as possessing a moral virtue. Of course, it may in fact be difficult to imagine such an agent. We need to imagine an agent who is honest ‘for its own sake’ in the sense that they don’t take themselves to have or to need any further reason to avoid deception. In such a case, the agent’s motivation to avoid deception will remain firm even when the avoidance of deception will result in much unnecessary

harm to another person, or where deception could harmlessly avert some grave injustice. This form of honesty would prompt an agent to reveal the location of a friend to the crazed axe murderer at the door, or to tell an unnecessarily hurtful and unhelpful truth to an elderly relative. This form of honesty would also prompt an agent to reveal unnecessary information in less extreme cases, but where there is simply no need to do so, such as when chatting to a cashier at the supermarket. Of course, we ought to accept that an agent who acts in this way out of a motivation to avoid deception does indeed possess a form of honesty. But it would be a stretch to suppose that the agent is thereby morally virtuous. The suggestion that morally virtuous forms of honesty will share in the underlying motivations involved in either kindness or justice results in plausible verdicts regarding when honesty is or is not a moral virtue. This provides us with reason to accept the suggestion that kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits.

A second example of a candidate moral virtue that we can consider is the trait of modesty. The discussion of this trait can be more brief than the discussion of honesty, both because modesty ought to be accommodated in just the same way as honesty and because modesty has already been discussed at some length in Chapter Two.<sup>32</sup> I have argued that modesty plausibly involves being motivated to de-emphasise one's attributes or accomplishments. However, it is possible for someone to possess this motivation as a result of any number of further, underlying motivations. An agent may be motivated to de-emphasise their own attributes out of an underlying motivation to be well-liked, or out of a desire to lull potential opponents into a false sense of security. When an agent's modest motivation is grounded in this way then we ought not to say that they possess modesty as a moral virtue.

However, in Chapter Two I highlighted the value of being motivated to de-emphasise one's own accomplishments out of a further motivation to protect and promote well-being. Modesty of this form can be referred to as *modesty-as-kindness* and ought to be viewed as a specific form of the fundamental virtue of kindness. The agent is motivated to protect and promote well-being in a particular way (through the de-emphasising of personal accomplishments or attributes). We can now see that this is not the complete

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<sup>32</sup> For more on the complexities of the debate surrounding the trait of modesty, see the references provided in Section 2 of Chapter Two.

story regarding morally valuable forms of modesty. An agent's motivation to de-emphasise their own accomplishments might also be grounded in the underlying motivation to ensure fair outcomes. For example, a footballer might downplay the importance of their winning goal out of a concern that those in the media will fail to give due consideration to the contribution of their teammates. When an agent's modesty is grounded in this way then we can say that they possess *modesty-as-justice*. Their modesty is simply a specific form of justice in the sense that they are motivated to ensure fair outcomes in a particular way (through the de-emphasising of personal accomplishments or attributes). Both modesty-as-kindness and modesty-as-justice can be understood as specific forms of fundamental virtues and so can be accepted as subordinate moral virtues on the proposed view. This looks to be an intuitively plausible result, and one that demonstrates how additional candidate virtues can be included on a list of virtues that takes only kindness and justice to be fundamental moral virtues.

It has been useful to consider the traits of honesty and modesty in order to explain one way in which a candidate virtue might come to be classed as subordinate to one of the fundamental virtues of kindness and justice. This involves the candidate virtue having a characteristic proximal motivation that is grounded in a virtuous underlying motivation. For example, a motivation to avoid deception might be grounded in an underlying motivation to ensure fair outcomes. However, there is another way in which a trait can be taken to be a restricted form of a more fundamental virtue. In order to explain this it will be useful to return briefly to Zagzebski's account of the intellectual virtues. Zagzebski's account highlights the possibility that a trait may involve a direct motivation towards just one aspect of the motivation involved in a fundamental virtue. It will be useful to first explain this possibility before then discussing the candidate moral virtue of compassion.

According to Zagzebski, the underlying motivation for the intellectual virtues is the motivation to achieve cognitive contact with reality. It is clear that this concept is less familiar than the concepts of knowledge or true belief, and Zagzebski explains the motivation for cognitive contact with reality by saying that it "includes more than what

is usually expressed by saying that people desire truth”.<sup>33</sup> In particular, it includes being motivated towards truth, understanding, and knowledge, as well as towards that which will “enhance the quality of the knowing state”.<sup>34</sup> Examples of specific intellectual virtues which involve the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality have already been provided above. These traits involved a characteristic proximal motivation that was grounded in the fundamental motivation for cognitive contact with reality. However, we ought now to notice one further way in which a trait can count as involving a restricted form of the fundamental motivation. Zagzebski tells us that:

Although all intellectual virtues have a motivational component that aims at cognitive contact with reality, some of them may aim more at understanding, or perhaps at other epistemic states that enhance the quality of the knowing state, such as certainty, than at the possession of truth per se.<sup>35</sup>

While Zagzebski does not explain her own view in terms of a cardinal structure, I have suggested that her account is compatible with the idea that the fundamental intellectual virtue involves a direct motivation towards cognitive contact with reality in general, while the subordinate intellectual virtues involve proximal motivations that are grounded in this fundamental motivation. The fundamental intellectual virtue can be referred to as the love of knowledge. However, we can now see that there is another way in which a trait can be classed as a subordinate intellectual virtue. A trait ought to be classed as a restricted form of a fundamental virtue when it involves a direct motivation towards just one aspect of the fundamental motivation. That is, if a trait involves a direct motivation towards just one aspect of cognitive contact with reality (such as understanding or certainty) then it can be classed as a restricted form of the love of knowledge. It is not restricted in the sense that the agent is motivated to achieve cognitive contact via some proximal motivation (such as the proximal motivation to exhaustively investigate evidence) but because it is directly targeted at only one aspect of cognitive contact (such as understanding). The availability of this second way of counting as a restricted form of a fundamental virtue provides us with further opportunity to extend our list of subordinate virtues.

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<sup>33</sup> Zagzebski (1996) p. 167

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Returning to the moral domain, the fundamental motivations within this domain are the motivation to protect and promote well-being and the motivation to ensure fair outcomes. A further way in which some trait might be included as a restricted form of either kindness or justice will be for the trait to involve a direct motivation towards just one aspect of these fundamental motivations. One example of this is provided by the trait of compassion. The trait of compassion plausibly consists of a characteristic motivation to alleviate suffering. Given that the alleviation of suffering is simply one aspect of the protection and promotion of well-being, the trait of compassion can plausibly be listed as a restricted form of the fundamental virtue of kindness. It is directly targeted at one aspect of the fundamental motivation involved in kindness. In this way, the trait of compassion can be included on our list of the subordinate moral virtues.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, the list of suggested or candidate moral virtues includes more than just honesty, modesty and compassion (in addition to kindness and justice). I mentioned above that Robert Adams' *A Theory of Virtue* references over sixty virtue terms. While it won't be necessary to go through all of these terms here, I do want to briefly consider a few more candidate virtues in order to further demonstrate the options that exist for accommodating these traits. Some of the available options were discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the traits of courage and temperance. These traits, I have argued, ought to be viewed as *enablers* for moral virtue. Possessing (a relevant form of) courage or temperance will be necessary in order to ensure that virtuous motivations are sufficiently robust and so will be necessary for the possession of moral virtues.<sup>37</sup> I will now list a few more candidate virtues and explain how the cardinal understanding of virtue provides a plausible way of thinking about these traits.

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<sup>36</sup> It may be worth noting that this need not be the only way for (some form of) compassion to be included on the list of moral virtues. I am considering here the form of compassion that consists of a motivation to alleviate suffering for its own sake. In such a case, the compassion is a restricted form of kindness because it involves a direct motivation towards one aspect of the end associated with kindness. However, someone might possess a motivation to alleviate suffering that is proximal to an underlying motivation. If the underlying motivation is associated with a fundamental virtue, then that form of compassion will be included as a subordinate virtue in the same way as the forms of honesty and modesty that were discussed above.

<sup>37</sup> For more detail on this approach see Chapter Four, especially Section 4.



The trait of generosity plausibly involves being motivated to make your own time or possessions available for use in the service of others. If an agent has an underlying motivation such that they are motivated to use their time or possessions as a way of promoting the well-being of others, or as a way of ensuring that others receive a fair share, then their trait can be included as a subordinate virtue in the same way as honesty-as-kindness or honesty-as-justice. The agent will possess either generosity-as-kindness or generosity-as-justice. However, if an agent is motivated to give their own time or possessions to others out of an underlying motivation to improve their public image or to gain from the benefits of a good reputation then they do not thereby possess a moral virtue. Similarly, if someone is motivated to pay for their grandchild's education out of an underlying motivation to make the child's parents feel inadequate then they do not thereby possess a moral virtue, even if there might be a sense in which their behaviour does count as generous. The plausibility of these results demonstrates that the trait of generosity can be adequately accommodated by the cardinal understanding that I have proposed.

Consider next the trait of conscientiousness. As Slote tells us, "Conscientious concern to do what is right or to do one's duty is, after all, a motive, and a morality of motives needs to say something about how that motive is to be assessed."<sup>38</sup> Slote points out that we have good reason to be suspicious of the moral worth of an agent who possesses the pure form of conscientiousness, or who possesses a motivation to do their duty just for the sake of doing their duty. This trait may appear morally harmless and may sometimes lead to positive outcomes. But it may also be possessed by moral monsters, such as the "Nazi prison camp guard who executes Jews and gypsies because he thinks that it is his duty to do so".<sup>39</sup> However, the cardinal understanding of moral virtue provides us with a method for working out when this trait is morally valuable. If an agent is motivated to do their duty because they think that this will, in general, be a good way of protecting and promoting well-being then we should class them as possessing a subordinate moral

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<sup>38</sup> Slote (2001) p. 51

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 52

virtue.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, if an agent's motivation to do their duty is motivated by the underlying thought that this is what they owe to other people then it will be possible to classify them as possessing a subordinate form of the virtue of justice. Once again, the cardinal understanding that I have proposed helps us to reach intuitively acceptable verdicts regarding the moral worth of a specific candidate moral virtue.

There exist other character traits regarding which there is much confusion over both the nature of the trait and the moral status of the trait. The cardinal understanding of the virtues that I have proposed can help us to say consistent and plausible things in response to such examples. One trait which is the source of much disagreement in the literature is the trait of integrity. That integrity is valued in society may be reflected in the fact that we typically wish for integrity in our elected officials and law-makers. The trait has also been accepted as a virtue by contemporary virtue theorists. Integrity, understood as "personal consistency" makes it on to Adams' list of the virtues.<sup>41</sup> But this position is far from universal. Bernard Williams has argued that integrity is not a virtue,<sup>42</sup> while Greg Scherkoske has suggested that it be understood as an epistemic or intellectual virtue,<sup>43</sup> and Denise Dudzinski discusses the view that integrity is the name that we apply to the state of possessing *all* of the virtues.<sup>44</sup> In the face of such disagreement, it will be useful to consider the approach to integrity that is suggested by the cardinal understanding of the moral virtues.

An agent who possesses integrity is one who is consistent in their commitment to various causes or ends. This is reflected in the fact that we would seriously doubt the integrity of a politician who switched their position on a particular issue, or who switched party allegiance, whenever it was politically convenient to do so. Someone who consistently supports or fights for some cause will demonstrate a level of integrity throughout their life that is not shared by someone who simply follows the latest fads. Ought we to consider such personal consistency in a life to be a moral virtue? The

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<sup>40</sup> Evidence that an agent's conscientiousness is motivated in this way will be provided when the agent ceases to follow orders or to perform what they might have thought was their duty once it becomes apparent that this will not help them to protect and promote the well-being of others.

<sup>41</sup> Adams (2006) pp. 194–195

<sup>42</sup> Williams (1981) p. 49

<sup>43</sup> Scherkoske (2012) and Scherkoske (2013)

<sup>44</sup> Dudzinski (2004)

approach to integrity that is suggested by the cardinal understanding is similar to the approach to courage that was outlined in Chapter Four. Certain forms of courage enable the possession of moral virtue by ensuring the *robustness* of an agent's moral motivations. Integrity can be viewed as enabling moral virtue by ensuring the *persistence* of moral motivations. Integrity, then, will be morally valuable only when the agent's motivations are morally virtuous. Integrity in the enactment of a racist ideology will be of no moral worth, whereas integrity in the pursuit of fair outcomes or in the promotion of well-being will be of moral value. Integrity is not a moral virtue, but it will be possessed by those who are morally virtuous. This picture provides an explanation for the confusion over the status of integrity. While Williams was right in denying the virtue status of integrity, the intuition that integrity must be a (moral or epistemic) virtue can be explained by the fact that virtuous agents will demonstrate integrity when pursuing their virtuous ends. The ability to explain disagreement regarding integrity, in addition to providing a plausible account of that trait, provides further support for the cardinal understanding of the moral virtues that I have proposed.

The discussion in this section has demonstrated the ways in which a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues will be able to incorporate various traits as being subordinate moral virtues. Traits such as honesty, modesty and compassion can be included on the list of moral virtues whenever these traits are understood as restricted forms of the more fundamental virtues. This possibility ought to lessen the concern that an account which lists only kindness and justice as moral virtues will struggle to acknowledge the true richness of moral life. And the account gains further credibility by providing an understanding of the subordinate virtues which explains when these traits ought to be accepted as morally virtuous. While cardinal understandings of the virtues have not been popular in recent times, the considerations raised in this chapter highlight some of the positive aspects of such an approach. I will now continue to argue in favour of a cardinal understanding that lists kindness and justice as fundamentally virtuous traits. The remainder of the chapter will introduce two problems currently facing virtue theorists and will explain why the account proposed here would help to resolve those problems.

#### 4. THE CONFLATION PROBLEM

One problem that confronts all virtue theorists has been labelled by Julia Driver as the “conflation problem”.<sup>45</sup> This problem arises when virtue theorists are unable to explain or accommodate intuitive distinctions between different kinds of virtue. For example, the conflation problem faces virtue theorists who cannot accommodate the distinction between the moral virtues on the one hand and the intellectual (or epistemic) virtues on the other.<sup>46</sup> One way of responding to this problem will be to simply deny that we ought to distinguish between types of virtues in this way.<sup>47</sup> However, those who want to maintain the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues face the challenge of explaining how this distinction can be made in a way that is plausible. As Driver’s paper demonstrates, standard ways of making this distinction prove to be problematic.

Given the influence of Aristotle on contemporary virtue theorists, it is worth setting out the suggested distinction between moral and intellectual virtues that he provides. Aristotle suggests that moral and intellectual virtues are distinguished by the fact that they are acquired in different ways. While it is possible for the intellectual virtues to be taught by some expert, the moral virtues must be developed through habit. As Aristotle says:

intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, it is not clear that this distinction will divide up candidate virtues in the correct way. For example, certain traits that ought to intuitively count as being intellectual virtues appear no easier to teach than are traits widely acknowledged as being moral virtues. It is not obvious that we could teach someone to be intellectually fair or open-minded or inquisitive any more than we could teach someone to be virtuously

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<sup>45</sup> Driver (2003)

<sup>46</sup> Driver (2003, p. 367) explains that she uses the terms “intellectual virtue” and “epistemic virtue” interchangeably. I will follow that usage here.

<sup>47</sup> It has been argued that Plato made no distinction between the moral and the non-moral virtues. See Moravcsik (1992) p. 300. There is also some debate as to whether or not Hume accepted the need for any distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues. See Driver (2003) pp. 368–370.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle (trans. Ross) (1998) p. 28 [1103a14–20]

honest or kind. Furthermore, it may be the case that the development of certain intellectual virtues will require a period of habituation. It will not be sufficient for us to be told how to be intellectually thorough, for example. Instead, it will be important for us to practice acting in a thorough way, and to get into the habit of regularly engaging in the exhaustive investigation of evidence. Such examples point to the deficiencies of Aristotle's proposed method for distinguishing the moral and intellectual virtues, and this deficiency is acknowledged by both Zagzebski and Driver.<sup>49</sup>

In 'The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue', Driver discusses a variety of alternative approaches to this issue in an attempt to demonstrate the need for a new proposal. It is not my intention here to list all of the various alternatives discussed by Driver, or to evaluate the strength of the arguments that Driver provides for the rejection of those alternatives. I also do not intend to argue here against Driver's own proposal for distinguishing the moral and intellectual virtues (although I did argue against Driver's consequentialist approach to identifying the moral virtues in Chapter Five). Instead, my aim is to explain a method for distinguishing moral and intellectual virtues that becomes available once we accept the cardinal picture of the moral virtues that has been proposed in this chapter. The plausibility of this method provides further support for the acceptance of the cardinal understanding of moral virtue.

Different types of virtue ought to be distinguished by appeal to their motivational aspects. Once we accept the cardinal structure of virtue that I have proposed, it becomes clear that all of the moral virtues will share in (some aspect of) an underlying virtuous motivation. If we also accept the amended version of Zagzebski's account of the intellectual virtues then it will be possible to say the same for virtues within that domain. We could then identify traits as being either moral or intellectual virtues (or neither) depending on the fundamental motivation that they involve. Driver does consider this possibility and is keen to argue against such an approach. Two of the alternatives criticised by Driver are particularly relevant for the discussion in this chapter.

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<sup>49</sup> See Zagzebski (1996) pp. 140–151 and Driver (2003) pp. 370–371.

One of the approaches criticised by Driver is the suggestion from Zagzebski that the intellectual virtues can be distinguished by their shared motivation for cognitive contact with reality. The reason given for dismissing this approach is that it:

seems to be the case that some intellectual virtues may involve an at least limited failure to consider various aspects of reality – for example, focus and concentration may involve the capacity to exclude irrelevant (but true) facts.<sup>50</sup>

However, this objection to Zagzebski's treatment of the intellectual virtues is far from conclusive. One quick response to the objection would be to point out that attributes such as good concentration or the ability to focus are not obvious candidates for the status of intellectual virtue. They may be more akin to capacities like a reliable memory or good eyesight, and it remains controversial whether or not these should count as being intellectual virtues alongside traits such as open-mindedness, inquisitiveness or intellectual thoroughness. A second response to this objection involves looking again at the detail of Zagzebski's account of cognitive contact with reality. As explained above, being motivated for cognitive contact with reality includes being motivated to achieve states such as true belief, knowledge and understanding, as well as being motivated towards what will "enhance the quality" of those states. Therefore, if someone is deeply motivated to focus or to concentrate on some particular aspect of reality in order to attain a better understanding of it, or in order to become more certain of some fact (and so to enhance the quality of their knowledge) then it will be possible to say that that person shares in the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality. This means that Zagzebski's approach would be able to include those attributes that are highlighted as being potentially problematic by Driver. Driver's objection to Zagzebski's motivations-based approach to distinguishing the intellectual virtues is not successful.

Driver also criticises a motivations-based approach to distinguishing the moral virtues. The approach that is considered suggests that all moral virtues share in an underlying benevolent motivation, understood as a concern for others. Driver explains that there are:

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<sup>50</sup> Driver (2003) p. 376

reasons for doubting that moral virtues have benevolence as a characteristic motivation: it is unclear that this needs to be the case for virtues like justice and honesty, for example. Then there is Hume's point that we do think persons can have a variety of moral virtues that are distinctive, and this becomes difficult to spell out if all of them are understood simply in terms of being motivated by benevolence.<sup>51</sup>

I am in agreement with Driver here, and it will be important to explain how the motivations-based method for distinguishing the moral and intellectual virtues that I will now propose is sensitive to these concerns.

If we accept the cardinal understanding of the virtues that I have proposed then a motivations-based method for distinguishing moral and intellectual virtues is immediately available. The intellectual virtues are those that share in an underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality. The moral virtues are those that share in either the underlying motivation associated with kindness or the underlying motivation associated with justice. This approach is compatible with Driver's assertion that traits like justice need not be fundamentally motivated by a concern for the overall welfare of others. It is important to note that this approach is also sensitive to the variety of virtues that different people might possess. I explained above how various traits (including honesty, modesty and compassion) can be included as subordinate moral virtues on the cardinal understanding that I have proposed. Different subordinate virtues will be distinct in the sense that they will involve distinct proximal motivations, or will involve being directly motivated towards different aspects of the underlying motivations. This means that it will be possible to include a wide variety of subordinate virtues and, therefore, it will be possible to be sensitive to the different ways in which people might be virtuous, at the same time as maintaining that all moral virtues share in one of two fundamental motivations. The motivations-based approach that I have proposed is not vulnerable to the objections that Driver raises for the approach that focuses solely on benevolence. And the motivations-based approach that results from accepting the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 372 (This quote was previously cited when dismissing Slote's care-based version of the fundamental value approach in Chapter Five.)

cardinal understanding of the virtues also leads to interesting and plausible conclusions with regards to specific candidate virtues.

Consider again the trait of honesty, understood as involving a characteristic deep motivation to avoid deception. I demonstrated above how different forms of honesty will be grounded in different underlying motivations. Honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice will be classed as moral virtues as a result of being grounded in the motivations associated with either kindness or justice. However, we can now see that it may also be possible for honesty to be classed as an intellectual virtue. It will be possible for the motivation to avoid deception to be grounded in an underlying motivation for truth. When this is the case, we ought to view that form of honesty as sharing in the motivation for cognitive contact with reality. Different forms of honesty, therefore, ought to be awarded differing virtue status. Honesty-as-kindness and honesty-as-justice are moral virtues, honesty grounded in a desire for truth may be an intellectual virtue, and honesty grounded in a desire to be cruel is a non-virtue. That the trait of honesty divides up in this way explains the difficulty experienced by Driver when trying to accommodate that trait, with honesty leading Driver to suggest that “There is also the possibility that things just are fuzzy, and that is why some virtues are difficult to classify.”<sup>52</sup> The motivations-based method which follows on from the cardinal understanding of the virtues can reveal to us the cause of this apparent fuzziness. If we focus only on honesty’s characteristic motivation to avoid deception then it is difficult to classify the trait as either a moral virtue or an intellectual virtue. This difficulty is explained once we focus on the underlying motivations involved in different forms of honesty. This focus reveals to us that different forms of honesty will differ in terms of their virtue status, and this is why it is difficult to classify honesty in general. By providing this explanation, as well as providing a plausible account of when honesty ought to be considered an intellectual or a moral virtue, the motivations-based method for distinguishing types of virtue recommends itself for acceptance.

The proposed method also leads to plausible conclusions regarding specific candidate intellectual virtues. One widely accepted intellectual virtue is the trait of inquisitiveness,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 381



which can be understood as involving a characteristic motivation to engage in investigations and to ask questions. It is clear that this characteristic motivation will often be grounded in an underlying motivation for some aspect of cognitive contact with reality. In such a case, inquisitiveness will indeed be labelled as an intellectual virtue on the proposed method. However, it will also be possible for forms of inquisitiveness to share in the underlying motivations associated with either kindness or justice. An agent may be motivated to ask questions out of a fundamental motivation to ensure fair outcomes. We might hope that such a form of inquisitiveness will be possessed by judges or lawyers. Similarly, an agent may be motivated to ask questions out of a fundamental motivation to protect and promote well-being. We might hope that such a form of inquisitiveness will be possessed by medical practitioners or social workers. In these cases, the form of inquisitiveness that is possessed ought to be classed as a moral virtue. We can refer to the forms of inquisitiveness that are possessed in each of these cases as *inquisitiveness-as-justice* and *inquisitiveness-as-kindness*, respectively. Alternatively, an agent's motivation to ask questions might be grounded in an underlying motivation to embarrass others or to make themselves look good. Forms of inquisitiveness that are grounded in this way ought not to be classed as either morally or intellectually virtuous. The motivations-based method for distinguishing types of virtue provides plausible results when dealing with cases of this type, as well as helping to explain the ways in which different forms of the same trait can differ in terms of their virtue status.

The conflation problem is one that faces all virtue theorists. In particular, it is important that any virtue theorist is able to explain how we ought to distinguish moral and intellectual virtues.<sup>53</sup> If we accept the cardinal understanding of the moral virtues that I have proposed in this chapter then it will be possible to endorse a motivations-based method for distinguishing different types of virtue. The moral virtues are those that share in the underlying motivation associated with either kindness or justice, while the intellectual virtues (if we agree with Zagzebski) are those that share in the underlying motivation for cognitive contact with reality. I have explained how this method allows us to make the distinction between types of virtue in a plausible way, as well as illuminating the intuitively appealing possibility that different forms of the same trait

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<sup>53</sup> Or else provide arguments for why we should deny the need for any distinction of this type.

might differ in terms of their virtue status. The cardinal understanding of the virtues that I have proposed therefore leads to a method that would allow us to resolve the conflation problem. This provides us with good reason to accept that proposal.

## 5. THE ENUMERATION PROBLEM

A second issue facing virtue theorists has recently been identified by Daniel Russell and is referred to as “the enumeration problem”.<sup>54</sup> It is perhaps easier to explain this problem with reference to virtue *ethics*, before then explaining why it is also problematic at the level of virtue *theory*.<sup>55</sup> Russell argues that the enumeration problem arises out of the combination of two features of contemporary forms of virtue ethics, one necessary feature and one commonplace feature.<sup>56</sup> The necessary feature is that all forms of virtue ethics must explain morally right action in terms of the moral virtues. It may be helpful to mention some specific (and highly influential) examples of approaches of this sort. Rosalind Hursthouse tells us that the right action is the one that the virtuous agent would characteristically perform, where the virtuous agent is taken to be the agent who possesses the moral virtues.<sup>57</sup> Christine Swanton suggests that the right action is the one that is “overall virtuous” in the sense that it “hits the target of” the virtues to the extent that this is possible.<sup>58</sup> On both of these influential versions of virtue ethics, right action is explained with reference to the moral virtues. In fact, this is a necessary feature of all forms of virtue ethics.

According to Russell, the enumeration problem arises when this necessary feature of virtue ethics is combined with a commonplace one. The commonplace feature has already been alluded to in this chapter. Virtue ethicists have been extremely liberal when discussing the virtues and when assigning virtue status to different traits. Russell is concerned about the tendency to identify virtues in ways that lead to there being “innumerable virtues”.<sup>59</sup> For example, if we think that there could be a corresponding virtue for all of the issues or areas in life in which it is possible to do well, then it seems

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<sup>54</sup> Russell (2009) Part II

<sup>55</sup> The virtue ethics/virtue theory distinction is explained in the General Introduction.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 146–151

<sup>57</sup> Hursthouse (1999) Chapter 1

<sup>58</sup> Swanton (2003) Chapter 11

<sup>59</sup> Russell (2009) p. 147

likely that we will be left with an uncountable number of virtues. Russell provides an example to help demonstrate this point:

For instance, virtue ethicists often observe that people may be intemperate about food, say, but temperate about drink and sex, and conclude that the apparently single virtue of ‘temperance’ must in fact be a host of smaller-scope virtues like temperance-about-sex, temperance-about-drink, etc. But of course people compartmentalize character traits in all sorts of ways, and the principle generalizes; so on this sort of approach, there seems no way to escape the virtues being infinitely many.<sup>60</sup>

This will be a problem for virtue ethicists given the necessary feature of explaining right action in terms of the virtues. If a right action is one that is in accordance with all of the virtues, but the virtues are “infinitely many”, then it will not be possible for us to work out whether any particular action is in fact a right action. This is the enumeration problem as it applies to virtue ethics.

The enumeration problem also applies at the level of virtue theory. While virtue ethicists need the virtues in order to explain morally right action, virtue theorists need the virtues in order to explain what it means to be an overall virtuous person. If a virtuous person is one who possesses the virtues, but the virtues are infinitely many, then it is not clear how we could come to understand what it means to be a virtuous person. Russell sums up the enumeration problem for both virtue ethics and virtue theory in the following way:

If right action is action in accordance with the virtues, and a virtuous person a person who has the virtues, but virtue ethics tells us that the virtues are infinitely many, then virtue ethics cannot say what right action is action in accordance with, or what it would be to be a virtuous person.<sup>61</sup>

If there are infinitely many distinct virtues then it will be impossible to tell whether or not an action is in accordance with all of them, or whether or not an individual possesses

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 145

all of them. And this would mean that we are unable to work out whether or not the action is right, or the individual is overall virtuous.

The cardinal understanding of the moral virtues that I have proposed is able to avoid this problem. Indeed, Russell himself argues that a possible response to his enumeration problem would be to revive the idea of cardinality that is found in the work of the Stoics and Aquinas.<sup>62</sup> On the view that I favour, there are only two fundamental moral virtues: the virtues of kindness and of justice. This is a far cry from the unmanageably long or even infinite list of virtues that led to concerns about the possibility of working out who counts as a virtuous person. At the same time, however, it is not the case that the proposed account avoids the enumeration problem at the expense of ignoring the many different ways in which someone can be considered virtuous. I explained above how the cardinal approach allows us to incorporate other traits to our list of the virtues, not as entirely independent entities that need to be accounted for, but as differing aspects of the traits that we have already accepted. Traits such as honesty-as-kindness, honesty-as-justice, modesty-as-kindness, and so on, allow us to paint a picture of the virtuous agent that is sufficiently rich and detailed, at the same time as allowing us to maintain that the moral virtues are in fact (extremely) countable. In this way, the cardinal understanding that is proposed in this chapter allows us to avoid the enumeration problem without leading to a problematically restricted conception of the ways in which someone might be considered a virtuous agent.

Before concluding this section, it is important to consider a possible response to the claim that a cardinal understanding of the virtues will allow us to avoid the enumeration problem. The enumeration problem arises when the various components involved in being a virtuous person (the virtues) are so numerous as to make it impossible to work out whether or not any given individual actually is virtuous overall. However, we might now worry that a similar problem arises for the cardinal approach that I have proposed. On this approach, it appears as if the fundamental virtues of kindness and justice are themselves comprised of a number of further components (the subordinate virtues). If being kind overall involves possessing all or a significant proportion of the virtues that

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp. 148–150, and Chapter 6

are subordinate to kindness, and if the virtues subordinate to kindness are in fact infinite, then it will be difficult for us to tell whether or not any given individual is kind overall.<sup>63</sup> The enumeration problem then re-appears. For standard, non-cardinal accounts of the virtues the enumeration problem highlights a difficulty in working out whether or not any given individual is virtuous overall. On the cardinal understanding of the virtues that I have proposed it appears as if the enumeration problem will highlight a difficulty in working out whether or not any individual actually possesses either of the fundamental virtues. If this is correct then the proposed understanding will not have allowed us to avoid the difficulties stemming from the enumeration problem.

However, this worry is the result of a misunderstanding of the cardinal approach. On the standard, non-cardinal view, the virtues are not divided into different classes. All of the different virtues are equally fundamental. If we say that being virtuous overall means possessing all of these different fundamental virtues, then overall virtue will be a composite notion. Referring to someone as being ‘overall virtuous’ will be a shorthand way of saying that they possess a whole host of different and equally fundamental traits. The enumeration problem then arises when the number of those traits becomes unmanageably large. On the cardinal understanding of virtue, the fundamental virtues are not composite in this way. To possess the fundamental virtue of kindness is simply to possess one, easily understandable, motivation – a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. Similarly, to possess the fundamental virtue of justice is simply to possess the one deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes. The enumeration problem does not arise here because possessing a fundamental virtue does not consist in possessing a whole host of different and independent components. Of course, reflecting on the subordinate virtues allows us to identify the complexity of moral life, and the different extents to which different people might possess the fundamental virtues. As Russell tells us, thinking about the subordinate virtues merely “enriches our understanding of the cardinal virtues; the virtues by which we understand ‘overall virtuous’ do not multiply thereby.”<sup>64</sup> This is because possessing a subordinate virtue is not to possess something that is separate and distinct from a fundamental virtue. On the

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<sup>63</sup> A version of this worry is raised by Christopher Toner in his review of Russell’s work. See Toner (2011) pp. 460–461.

<sup>64</sup> Russell (2009) p. 156

cardinal understanding that I have proposed, possessing honesty-as-kindness is not a different thing from possessing kindness, in the way that possessing each individual virtue is a different thing from possessing overall virtue on the standard approach. Instead, possessing honesty-as-kindness is just one way of being kind. And being kind is a simple matter of possessing a sufficiently deep motivation to protect and promote well-being. There is no composite notion here, and no “rampantly expanding” list of independent virtues.<sup>65</sup> For this reason, the enumeration problem does not threaten the account of the virtues that I have proposed.

It is now possible to see that we have good reason to accept the claim that kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits, so long as that claim is understood within an overall cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. Accepting this overall picture leads to plausible accounts of other candidate virtues such as honesty and compassion, as well as providing a resolution to the conflation problem. We can now see that a cardinal understanding which posits a manageable number of fundamental virtues will also allow us to avoid Russell’s enumeration problem. These considerations provide strong support for the proposal that I have made in this chapter.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter has been to explain and defend the suggestion that kindness and justice are the (only) moral virtues. In order to do this I have appealed to the idea of cardinality among the virtues. On a cardinal understanding of the virtues, virtues are divided into two classes – the fundamental virtues and the subordinate virtues. Once we accept that kindness and justice are the fundamental moral virtues, it becomes possible to nevertheless acknowledge the complexity of moral life through the addition of various subordinate virtues, including (forms of) honesty, modesty and compassion. The virtuous forms of these traits ought not to be viewed as distinct from the fundamental virtues, but instead as being specific aspects of those more general traits. I have argued that this approach provides a plausible account of specific candidate virtues and of when those traits ought to be classed as being morally virtuous. I have also argued that the cardinal understanding makes it possible to respond to both the conflation problem and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 157

the enumeration problem. These considerations provide us with good reason to accept the initially surprising suggestion that only kindness and justice are fundamentally virtuous traits.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The concept of virtue is a vital one for many current debates within philosophy. In particular, both virtue ethics and virtue epistemology have come to be viewed as legitimate contenders within their respective domains. The task of virtue theory – of giving an account of the virtues – is therefore an especially pressing one. If we do not have a satisfactory account of the virtues then we will be unable to determine (for example) how the morally virtuous agent would act, or what the intellectually virtuous agent would believe. That is, we will be unable to evaluate those virtue-centric approaches that have come to be accepted as legitimate contenders within both ethics and epistemology.

This thesis has engaged with the debate within virtue theory in two important ways. Firstly, I have provided a defence of the motivations model of the moral virtues on which a moral virtue consists of a deep motivation towards a characteristic end. The virtue of kindness, for example, consists of a deep motivation towards the protection and promotion of well-being. I defended this account firstly by arguing against two rival approaches – the skills model and the composite model – in order to demonstrate that the possession of a component of intellectually demanding skill(s) or know-how is neither sufficient nor necessary for moral virtue. I then considered some especially challenging objections for the motivations model and argued that plausible responses are available for each of these objections. This thesis demonstrates that the motivations model is a legitimate contender within this debate and a live option for those working in virtue theory. This conclusion is significant given the pervasive influence of Aristotle on contemporary virtue theory, and the related assumption that the possession of moral virtue requires the possession of intellectual expertise. By presenting a plausible alternative model of the moral virtues, I hope to have encouraged a re-assessment of this assumption, and a widening of the class of agents who can be rightly viewed as possessors of the moral virtues.

The second way in which I have attempted to add to the debate within virtue theory concerns the question of which traits ought to be identified as being moral virtues. I have argued that there is good reason to consider the suggestion that kindness



(understood as a deep motivation to protect and promote well-being) and justice (understood as a deep motivation to ensure fair outcomes) are fundamentally virtuous traits. I have then expanded upon and defended this suggestion. Kindness and justice ought to be viewed as fundamental virtues within a cardinal understanding of the moral virtues. All other moral virtues should be viewed as being subordinate to these two traits, in the sense that they are restricted forms or exercises of either kindness or justice. This suggestion gains credibility from the fact that it leads to intuitive accounts of specific subordinate virtues, such as honesty, modesty and compassion, and is able to explain when those traits ought to be viewed as morally valuable. The cardinal understanding that I have proposed also allows for convincing responses to important challenges that face all virtue theorists, such as the “conflation problem” and the “enumeration problem”. Given the plausibility and usefulness of this cardinal understanding of the virtues, there is good reason to accept the suggestion that we should identify kindness and justice as the (fundamental) moral virtues.

I have now provided answers to two important questions within virtue theory. Regarding the nature of the moral virtues, I have argued that a moral virtue consists of a deep motivation towards a characteristic end. Regarding the identity of the moral virtues, I have argued that kindness and justice are the fundamental moral virtues (while other traits can be included as subordinate moral virtues). The combination of these two answers provides a distinct and plausible approach within virtue theory.

The resurgence of interest in the virtues within the moral domain was prompted by the possibility that focusing on the virtues could provide an important alternative to deontological and consequentialist approaches. It is worth pointing out again that this thesis has been a contribution to virtue theory as opposed to virtue ethics. That is, I have not been looking to provide an account of morally right action which gives a central role to the moral virtues. However, the approach to virtue theory that I have provided in this thesis will hopefully be of interest to those working within virtue ethics, as well as those who are interested in evaluating approaches within normative ethics more generally. Consider, for example, the claim that a right action is one that the virtuous agent would characteristically perform. The plausibility of this claim will be at least partly determined by what the virtuous agent is like, and this will be a matter of

which traits are taken to be virtuous. I have not here argued in favour of any particular form of virtue ethics, and I have also not provided responses to the many independent objections that have been raised against virtue ethics (such as the difficulty of accounting for supererogation, or in providing action guidance in cases where the virtues conflict). However, it is clear that the virtue theory one endorses will have an impact on the plausibility of the forms of virtue ethics that are available. Examining the consequences for virtue ethics of accepting the virtue theory that I have defended in this work is one possible and appealing avenue for future research.

For now, however, my focus has been at the level of virtue theory. I have shown that there is good reason to accept that moral virtues consist of deep motivations towards characteristic ends, and that the fundamental moral virtues are the traits of kindness and justice.

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